THROUGH BOLSHEVIK RUSSIA

Mrs. Philip Snowden

THROUGH BOLSHEVIK RUSSIA

THROUGH BOLSHEVIK RUSSIA

BY
MRS. PHILIP SNOWDEN

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne
1920

INTRODUCTION

I HAVE written these impressions of Bolshevik Russia with the object of promoting peace with that great country, by adding the evidence to that already given in numerous articles and books of one more eye-witness of the terrible sufferings of the Russian people.

I paid a six weeks' visit to Russia as a member of the Delegation chosen by the Executive Committee of the Labour party and of the Trades Union Congress, in fulfilment of a resolution passed by a special Trade Union Congress held on December 10th, 1919, which demanded of the British Government " the right to an independent and impartial enquiry into the industrial, economic and political conditions of Russia."

So much about Russia that was contradictory had appeared in the newspaper press, with the balance of statement on the side of evil report, that it was increasingly felt by the organised workers of Great Britain the truth must at all costs be discovered, if that were possible, by investigators selected by themselves.

In addition, it was thought right and wise to

discover if there existed anything in the behaviour of the Russian Government and people so menacing to ourselves as to warrant the attacks upon Russia of foreign Governments, including our own. We did not believe that any possible conduct of the Government of Russia could justify the supply of British men, arms and money to Russia's enemies; and we have returned unanimously confirmed in that judgment, convinced that Russian internal affairs are her own business and not ours.

The Delegation left Newcastle on April 27th, and travelled by Christiania, Stockholm and Reval. We returned to England on June 30th.

Wherever we went we discovered the greatest interest in our mission. We came in contact with representatives of the Socialist and Labour movement in all the towns through which we passed. In Christiania we found that the Labour party had so far expressed its approval of the doings in Moscow as to have applied for membership of the Third International, that great symbol of Communism, and the international organ through which the Communists propose to work for world-revolution.

In applying for this membership, the Norwegian party made two important reservations: It wished to leave its members free on the point of armed revolution, and it insisted on equality

of voting power for peasant and artisan. No reply had been received from Moscow at the time of our visit. I afterwards discovered in Moscow a sternly unrelenting attitude on the question of revolution by violence.

In Stockholm the great bulk of the Labour movement is against Bolshevism, although a small section approves it. We behaved with strict impartiality to both kinds, and received and gave hospitality indiscriminately.

The same story was repeated at Reval. And in common fairness to the Bolsheviki it must be admitted that they have a grievance against the Moderates of Reval as great as any grievance the Moderates may have against them. They appear to attack each other with equal ferocity.

I have not attempted in these pages to argue right down to the last syllable any one of the great questions which are pivotal to modern political controversies. Other writers have done that, or will do it. Russian Communist literature circulates abundantly in this country for all those whose interest in the Russian experiment lies deep. I have sought only to give a series of pen-pictures of Russian life under the Bolsheviki, and to state interesting facts about that small piece of mighty Russia which it was my great privilege to see. In choosing to do this I shall have satisfied neither of the two sorts

of extremist, who will, without doubt, quote my sentences in defence of the Red and the White.

A friend said to me in discussing the question that there was an explosive quality in the word *Bolshevism* which caused it to be popular with those who wished to destroy some hated thing. Such a word as *aneurism* could not be employed with one-tenth of the effect; but Bolshevism! The word is a veritable bomb when exploded in the ears of the timid and conventional.

The simple fact of the matter is, that in regard to Bolshevism, as in other matters, the truth lies between the two extremes of statement. What is being said and done in Russia is neither perfectly good nor wholly bad. The same with the men and women themselves. They are creatures very much like ourselves, who are called upon to deal with a situation which is extremely difficult, and who are dealing with it in the way which to them seems best. They have made mistakes, some of these very big mistakes. But Lenin and some of the others have had the courage to admit this. There is abundant hope for a country whose rulers know when they are mistaken and are willing to adapt themselves and to try again. If this sensible type of governor has less power than the other at the moment, it will not always be so. Much depends upon the conduct of the outer world.

If Russia be speedily restored to the family of nations and real intercourse with her be again established, the result will be, in all human probability, a surprising approximation of Russian methods to those of the rest of Europe. Let us hope it may also mean a quicker stride of European democracies outside Russia in the path of social progress and economic salvation along which Russia has attempted, perhaps too rapidly for success, to advance.

For myself, the result of our investigations is summed up in this: I am not hostile to the Russian Revolution which the tyrannous regime of the Czars made necessary and inevitable; but I am utterly opposed to the *coup d'état* of the Bolsheviki, as I should be to the seizing of power by any small minority of the people; for out of this action has sprung a large part of the misery the unhappy people of Russia endure.

THROUGH BOLSHEVIK RUSSIA

CHAPTER I

A Starving People

IN every country in the world oceans of eloquence and torrents of passion are being poured out in the attempt to prove that Bolshevist Russia is a heaven or a hell. The friendships of a lifetime are being broken in fruitless efforts to prove either the faultlessness or the folly of the theory of Communism. The doctrines of Karl Marx and the philosophy of Bakounin are the twin rocks upon which the Labour movement in every land threatens to split. Without in the remotest degree intending or desiring it, Lenin has drawn to his head a halo of some magnificence, and an odour of sanctity, notwithstanding the inscription upon its walls, envelops that part of the Kremlin where the little, great man sits and issues his decrees.

All this discussion of the attempt of a handful

of sincere and brilliant men and women to build upon the ruins of war, famine and pestilence a new and better social system in one gigantic effort is inevitable; and in common fairness it must be said that the experiment in Russia might have been of the greatest possible value to the rest of the world had its purity not been sullied by civil wars and unpardonable alien aggression. As it is, much may be learnt from the mistakes which the Bolsheviki have made and which they themselves admit. It is not the frank critic of Bolshevism who is doing harm to the Bolshevik cause. It is those supporters of Lenin in this, and other countries, who maintain that no compromise with the old has been made by the new in Russia, and who, if they could be made to admit that their Russian comrades had modified their decrees to meet the necessities of the hour, would regard this conduct as traitorous, and would denounce with equal extravagance of language the men they had before incontinently adored.

But through all the noise of argument and heat of propaganda about the dictatorship of the proletariat, the revolution by violence and the programme of the Third International, comes the low wailing of the suffering and the dying, an appeal for help to the pitying heart of mankind which should take precedence of the claim on the

world's attention of all political and economic theories, however promising those may be.

For this reason the members of the British Labour Delegation took speedy and unanimous action towards bringing to an end the war between Russia and Poland, and with equal unanimity protested to their own Government against the blockade, which is supposed to be abolished in theory but which is as effective in practice as ever. The cruel effects of the blockade upon Russia's hapless people became obvious through the evidence of our own eyes in the first twenty-four hours of our investigation. So unmistakable was that evidence that a telegram was despatched to Great Britain, urging the folly of helping the war and maintaining in effect the blockade, and requesting that the British people might no longer continue to be implicated in either.

The number of Russian people is variously estimated at one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and eighty millions. In a country where the fortunes of war add twenty millions of inhabitants to the country's population in one lucky day or take fifty millions away as the result of a disastrous encounter with the enemy, this statistical looseness has a reasonable explanation.

But to take the lower number, one hundred and twenty-five millions. Leaving out of account the army, which is very well fed, and the majority

of the children, who undoubtedly receive special care and attention, most of the people are either terribly ill-clad or hungry, probably both. Most of them are suffering from dirt and disease; many of them are actually ill or dying. Millions have already died. Many millions more are foredoomed to death from cold this coming winter unless help of the right kind and in sufficient quantities comes speedily. Of what immediate concern to these unfortunate masses of unhappy people is the materialist conception of history, the proletarian dictatorship, or even the Third International? Eighty-five per cent of the population is composed of peasants, most of whom I am convinced never heard of such things. To these, Lenin is no more than a name, a devil to the rich peasant, a name with which to conjure out of both rich and poor peasant the stocks of food they are believed to be hiding. Of such a sort was the late Czar to these poor, ignorant folk. But the old Czar was their "little father" and crept closer and more warmly to their imagination than the new ruler.

Poor, unhappy, lovable people of Russia! The hardening, educating, organising process which is going on in your midst may one day prove a boon to you, though it adds unspeakably to your present misery. The discipline of the West, if taken with its civilisation, may add to

the fullness of your future life. But what you want at the moment is very much less and very much simpler than the ardent theorists have conceived you need, and that you ought to want and must be made to have.

The people of Russia want peace and bread, peace that will last and bread that they can eat. I am convinced without the shadow of a doubt, that they are everywhere sick to the very soul of bloodshed. They dislike even the talk about war and revolutions. They sing "The Internationalé" whenever the orchestra strikes up, but it is with the mechanical tones of a musical-box or a street-organ. They long for rest and quiet. They want to marry and have children and be able to feed and house them properly. The peasants want to till their farms undisturbed, and in the quiet evenings to sing their quaint and mournful songs to one another or in happy chorus in the village club. The town workers want to do their day's work in the factory or the shop and to spend glad, talkative hours in the cafés as in those days before the misery of war came upon them.

Petrograd has all the appearance of a dying city. Before the war it was reputed to have a population of two and a half millions; now it numbers between eight and nine hundred thousand souls. Where have all these people gone? I asked a Communist the question.

A relatively tiny number of the rich are in exile. Many have died in the war. Some have fled to the country, where living is more abundant. But hundreds of thousands have died of hunger and disease. Besides the lack of food there is an almost entire lack of medicines, anæsthetics, linen for bandages, disinfectants and soap. These things have been kept out by the blockade. Disease has been epidemic and carried off hosts of people in face of the heroic but helpless doctors and nurses, very many of whom gave their own lives in a noble attempt to succour and save. A striking feature in Petrograd was the enormous number of short-haired girls and women.

"Is this a Russian custom?" I asked. "Not more than in any other country," was the reply. "In all probability all these women and girls have had typhus quite recently and lost their hair through it."

Those who have never seen the hunger-look in human eyes cannot even faintly imagine the pain of walking about the streets of a Russian town. I had experienced it first in Vienna, that once supremely gay and still very beautiful city. The knowledge of what the privations of the unhappy Austrians were (and still are) first came to me in a cheap restaurant, where I had gone to dine simply because the expensive meals at the hotel were so disgusting in their extravagance.

I raised my eyes from my plate for a second. At least a dozen pairs of eyes were glued hungrily to the simple food I was eating, and as hastily withdrawn when detected in the act. I found it almost impossible to eat in public after that, except when some hungry Austrian would consent to share the meal.

I have seen in Vienna old and young officers in uniform creep into hotels after dusk in the hope of getting scraps of food for their hungry children. I have seen a woman of refinement, with three small children clinging to her skirts, drop the red roses she was trying to sell as she reeled with fatigue against a wall. I have tasted the coloured water and imitation coffee in the cafés of the Ringstrasse. I have seen the skeleton babes and consumptive wives of the Austrian workmen and soldiers in their own homes. And because I had seen these things in Vienna I knew, without asking any questions in Petrograd, that the two cities share with most of the cities of Eastern and Central Europe the bonds of a common suffering.

This much must be said for the Communist Government: It is doing its best to secure an equal distribution amongst all sections of the working community of the very limited supplies of everything. The passport to food and clothing is work. St. Paul's dictum is taken literally in Russia. If the workers go short it is probably

because the food is not to be had. Either it is not procurable, because non-existent; or transport difficulties prevent it reaching the people.

Of course the speculator enters into the question, the adventurous private trader who, defiant of the law and at the risk of his life, buys from the peasant at a much higher price than the Government fixed price, and sells to the people privately or even in the open market. The Extraordinary Commission has a special department to deal with this man, and is very hard on him when caught; but he flourishes all the same, and will continue to do so just as long as it continues to be impossible for the citizen to live on the Government ration.

The loathsome black bread which is the people's daily diet is four hundred roubles* a pound when bought in the open market. White bread, which is really a light brown, is one thousand roubles a pound. Only children and sick persons are permitted white bread. Black bread can be bought more cheaply at the Soviet stores, but is often not procurable there for the last comers. Long queues of tired women are everywhere to be seen waiting their turn outside the Government bread shops.

And then the clothing! From Petrograd to Astrakhan I am quite sure that not a hundred people were seen in clothing that was not shabby

* The pre-war value of the rouble was about 2s.

and worn to a degree. Most of the British delegates wore their oldest clothes, garments which had been cast off and suddenly restored to use in contemplation of the trip to Russia. But those dear Russian people thought we were attired like princes. They turned us round to admire us. They patted and stroked our dresses and overcoats. They turned longing eyes upon our boots, and took great pleasure in handling the soft leather. One plutocrat offered fifty thousand roubles for a very ordinary pair of British shoes. Eighty thousand roubles was the price placed upon my own stout walking boots. When, out of gratitude to her for repeated little acts of kindness, I gave the girl who looked after my room a warm woollen jacket she fell on her knees and covered my hands with kisses. When, by way of thanks, I gave a dress and coat to the good woman who helped to nurse a sick friend, she sobbed on my shoulder from sheer overwhelming gratitude !

University professors came to see us, dressed like English tramps ! A great singer sang to us with the toes sticking through his boots ! Women of gentle birth and upbringing walked the hard pavement with their feet bound in strips of felt. Many had naked feet. Poor women were seen frequently who, judging by their outlines, had no shred of underclothing under their thin, cotton

dresses. Socks for big girls and grown women were a common sight and excited the curiosity of one Delegate who enquired if that were the latest fashion amongst the women in Russia.

"No" came the quick reply in the perfect English to which we were becoming accustomed, "it is not the latest fashion but the last economy. Socks use up less wool than stockings. It is considered good fortune to have either socks or stockings. Most people have neither." This form of economy, welcome during the hot summer weather, is frightful to contemplate for the hard Russian winter.

When one thinks of the passionate joy excited by the gift of a pair of stockings to each of a few gentle, self-respecting Russian girls; of what a reel of thread meant to the mother of a young family; of how much comfort an old flannel nightdress gave to a sick woman, since dead of debility due to lack of nourishment; of the amount of happiness a present of a tablet of soap conferred, the wrangling of political theorists, particularly in those countries where such sufferings have not been dreamt of, much less experienced, appear monstrous and cruel to the extent that these divert the public mind from the immediate problem of succour and relief.

CHAPTER II

Making Our Plans

THE individual has yet to be born who can be perfectly just. Even educated and cultured people find it difficult in any given set of circumstances not to exhibit their predilections; prejudice will be the last vice to disappear and toleration the last virtue to develop in any large number of human beings. The most that the members of the British Delegation would claim for themselves would be that each made a serious and honest attempt to prepare his, or her, mind for straight looking at, and hard thinking about, the great experiment with which we were soon to come to close quarters.

We knew we were going to a land radically different from all the European countries we had hitherto visited. We knew that serious and amazing things were alleged to have taken place there. Whilst we discounted most of the atrocity stories of the sensation-loving newspapers, we realised that, since war was not merely a game nor revolution a picnic, frightful things must

have happened. We had very definite views of the main principles embodied in the various Communist manifestos which, from time to time, had mysteriously found their way into this country. But we were solid in our conviction that, whatever we found in Russia, good, bad or indifferent, it was the concern of the Russians themselves, and became our business only when it was sought to impose upon Great Britain the same things, without regard to the vital differences between the two countries.

On the beautiful sea-trip from Stockholm to Reval we discussed with one another the possibilities of our excursion. Our little Swedish ship hugged the coast of Finland to avoid the many thousands of mines said to be loose upon the waters between Sweden and Esthonia, and the loveliness of a myriad wooded islands amongst which we threaded our way absorbed the best part of our interest until the open sea was reached.

"I wonder if we shall be allowed perfect freedom of action," murmured one of our number. "What shall we do if we find ourselves a sort of Cook's tourist party or the Royal Family?"

One was quite sure that, although we might be the guests of the Government, we should be allowed to go where we liked and do what we pleased. Another thought we should see as little as the Royal Family sees when it takes an

excursion amongst the people. A third welcomed the idea of a conducted party because of the language difficulty. A fourth expressed the view that we should ask for our passports and return home at once if we were placed under any kind of restraint. It was finally decided that we should wait and see !

After thirty hours of pleasant sailing, four only in the open sea, we entered the harbour at Reval in a half-moon, just in time to see the last rays of light from the setting sun make resplendent the gilded domes of the churches. Town and harbour appeared quaint and exquisite in the fading evening light, and the frank voices of the forty or fifty Esthonian Socialists who met us robbed the strangeness of its slight discomfort. These pleasant friends were representative of all the various Socialist sections in Reval—Left, Right and Centre ; and whilst they turned cold looks on one another, they united in warmth of welcome to us. Before we left the town we had supped with the Right and dined with the Left and insisted on taking an indiscriminate pleasure with all at the concert which the great Chaliapine gave that same evening in the big public hall of the city.

In the Hotel Petrograd, in Reval, sits Gowkovsky, the Bolshevik representative, through whose competent hands pass all communications

between Russia and the rest of Europe. He is a short man with brown beard and kind, shrewd eyes and very pleasant manner. He spread a royal banquet for us which included amongst its provisions the prohibited vodka, bidding us drink to the social revolution in a beverage which the Revolutionary Government, following the example of the Czar, has had the wisdom to forbid. The properties of this fiery drink must be of a very peculiar character, for one of the Delegates, who is not a total abstainer, has since commended the late Czar's ordinance abolishing the drink traffic and has publicly declared that the coming Revolution in Great Britain will have to be accompanied by the total prohibition of strong drink.

The absence of drinking-shops and of public drinking, and consequently of men and women the worse for liquor is a commendable feature of social life in Russia, and accounts for many good things, probably for the Revolution itself, almost certainly for the almost unvaried success of the Red armies. Of course there *is* wine in the country, sweet champagne, red Caucasian wines and the golden wines of Persia ; but these are for the sick and are not accessible to ordinary folk. A doctor's certificate is necessary to secure them. Almost certainly there are illicit stills in the country districts, and speculators are able to get hold of

spirituous liquors illegally ; but it would be an entirely hopeless business for the ordinary man or woman to try to discover strong drink anywhere, or to buy the expensive light wines that here and there can be discovered amongst the bottles of raspberry vinegar and lemonade. And the attitude of the Government to the question of drinking is evidenced in the fact that if a railway worker is discovered drunk, having possessed himself illegally of vodka, he is promptly shot.

Having feasted and entertained us to good Russian music, admonished us and put our passports in order, the kind-hearted Gowkovsky packed us off to Petrograd in charge of half a dozen or more of his trusty henchmen. Several of these were Jews—clever, brainy, shrewd, dogmatic ; excellent linguists, perfect interpreters.

One of the facts we marked very soon in our adventurous career was the large number of Jews who occupy positions of trust and influence in the Revolutionary Administration. We remarked upon it to the Jews themselves. We were informed that only two of the seventeen People's Commissars were Jews, but that very considerable numbers indeed were employed in administrative posts, both nationally and locally, and by the Extraordinary Commission. As the membership and activity of large numbers of Jews is a feature of continental Socialist societies,

particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, it is worth considering for a moment why this should be so. And in view of the deplorable tendency all over Europe towards Anti-Semitism, it is an obligation upon everybody to try sympathetically to understand the character and point of view of the Jew in Europe.

He forms, in the first place, a very large part of the population of all the great cities and smaller towns of Central Europe and Russia. He is, generally speaking, the best-educated part of the population where educational facilities have been open to him. The boycott of ages and the cruelties of centuries have sharpened his wits, developed his cunning, forced his energies into less desirable channels, and caused him to regard the men outside his race as his enemies against whom he must take care continuously to defend and protect himself. The Jewish mind is hard, logical and dogmatic. The Jew's temperament is artistic but his training is utilitarian. He is passionately interested in theory and will try to carry out his favourite one at all costs, given the power. Having no country of his own, where he does not love the country of his adoption he is more than usually international in his viewpoint and regards race before nation, and both, less than his theory of mankind. He has great powers of organisation. I speak of him as I have known

him and admired him in half the countries of Europe and the United States of America.

Over a plastic, passive people like the typical indolent Russian he was bound to have enormous power and influence. Said one of the best-known Jewish leaders in Russia to me when I had gently complained of too much discipline and too little freedom :

" But the Russian people are like children. They are not educated. They know nothing. They have been accustomed for centuries to slavery and dictation. Would you have us allow them to destroy themselves by their own incapacity and inexperience ? Would you give a vote to each of those millions of ignorant peasants ? It would be like putting a knife into the hands of a baby."

How familiar it all sounded to me, as reminiscences of the Woman Suffrage fight in England came to my mind, and I recalled the fact that this baby and carving-knife argument was one of the pet excuses for denying women their freedom.

None the less is it true that the Russian people in the main are unaccustomed to freedom, and by their nature and temperament are proper material for the exercise of power by the educated, dominating Jew. It would not be fair, however, to neglect to say that of those persons who spoke to me privately in condemnation of the Bolsheviki, a

very considerable number, if not the majority, were also Jews. One is driven to the conclusion that it is the activity and strength of his mind, and not necessarily a proclivity for Bolshevist theory which is chiefly responsible for the commanding position of the Jew in the political affairs of Europe in general and of Russia in particular.

Another Jew, a fair-haired, blue-eyed Jew from the United States, met us on the Russian frontier, and offered us greetings in the name of the Soviet Republic. He was an interesting personality, whose history as a leader of strikes in America he unfolded to us on the journey from the frontier to Petrograd. He had a special train waiting for us, gaily decorated with red bunting, fervent mottoes, and the green branches of trees. The train was attended by a number of Red Guards and Bashkir cavalrymen in gorgeous purple uniforms, with wonderful cloaks and long swords. From Reval to Narwa we had been just a plain, ordinary Cook's Tourist Party. From the Russian frontier to the end of our visit we were the Royal Family!

Perhaps the most thrilling and dramatic note was struck by the fixture of a big red flag on the frontier. The sight of it was altogether too much for some of our more ardent spirits. They burst rapturously into song, first "The Internationalé"

and then "The Red Flag," the favourite song of Socialists in Great Britain.

> The people's flag is deepest red,
> It shrouded oft our martyred dead.
> And ere the lips grew stiff and cold,
> Their heart's blood dyed its every fold.
>
> Then raise the scarlet standard high.
> Within its shade we'll live or die;
> Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
> We'll keep the Red Flag flying here.

At last we were about to enter the country where the Red Flag had become the national emblem, and was flying over every public building in the cities of Russia. The thought thrilled like new wine.

Half-way to Petrograd deputations from Trade Unions and Soviets came into the train and made complimentary speeches in a half-bashful manner, to which suitable responses were made. What a pleasant modest set of fellows they were, with big, blue innocent eyes and reluctant unobtrusive manner. We liked them immensely. We liked the plain people of Russia wherever we met them. At Petrograd itself a large company met us although it was three o'clock in the morning, and we were told that gigantic crowds had loitered about the station all the day in expectation of our coming and in the hope of getting a glimpse at the English strangers. We were at once motored to

the quarters which had been prepared for us, the palace of a Russian princess, and there, at four o'clock in the morning, we sat down to a simple but sufficient meal and received our welcome from the Trade Union officials who were to be our hosts during our stay.

We were behind the " iron curtain " at last !

CHAPTER III

Ghosts

WHEN I was a little child I had a lively and delicious contact with fairies. We used to laugh and sing and dance together through many happy hours like the good comrades we were. But I cannot say that I have ever seen a ghost; that is, I had never seen one until I went to Russia. During the whole of the time I was in Russia I was haunted.

The Russian novelists have been very faithful to their people. Turgenieff, Dostoievski, Gorky, Tolstoy, and the rest of them take one into the real Russia as one reads. It is a country peopled with human beings who dream dreams and see visions, who have suffered more cruelly and aspired more loftily than the people of most other European countries.

The Narishkin Palace in which we were lodged is a fine house devoted to the mistress of one of the Czars by her lover. It lies on the banks of the Neva and faces, on the other side, the grim fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. I stood on the

balcony and looked across the river at the place of horrors where so many of Russia's noblest men and women had gone to their deaths, the poor victims of tyrant princes and their ministers. The abominable cruelties practised upon the martyrs for Russian freedom have been as familiar to one's mind as the alphabet, and for almost as long. One's youngest, purest and best emotion has been given throughout one's life to those who have endured torture, disgrace and death for truth and liberty.

I recalled a meeting with Volkhovsy in England, deaf and crippled by his sufferings in this hideous fortress ; of Prince Kropotkin, one of the oldest of the surviving victims of Czarist tyranny ; of Madame Breshskovski, the " grandmother of the Revolution " ; of Marie Spirodovna, whose special sufferings as a young woman were loathsome and unspeakable. In sad procession these figures of tortured and wounded and dead passed silently before my eyes as I leaned over the stone balcony and gazed into the red light of the sky behind the dark fortress we were sometime soon to visit.

And into my dreams they pursued me. The room in the Narishkin Palace which I shared with Madame Balabanov was once on a time a beautiful *salon*. A scanty curtain which stretched only half-way across the room made a pretence of

dividing it in two and securing privacy for each of us. Behind the curtain was the door which opened into the dining-room. Close to my bed was a second door which led to the corridor, at the end of which was a bedroom. There were neither long curtains nor blinds to keep out the everlasting light. Some thin and inadequate muslin was drawn across the lower half of the windows, but was too scanty to afford any protection against observers in the building opposite.

On entering the room after the intense fatigue and excitement of the long journey one felt its beauty comforting and refreshing. The fine linen sheets, the soft silk hangings, the eiderdown bed-covers, the thick velvety carpet, the quaint, carved and gilded furniture spoke of gentle living utterly unlooked-for by us, and, to do ourselves justice, undesired by us in a country full of people slowly dying for lack of the barest necessaries. It was the most exaggerated kindness on the part of our hosts, so anxious to make us comfortable and happy, to give us the very best they possessed.

But there, for me, was the trouble. They gave us all this luxury and beauty, but was it theirs to give or ours to receive? *They* had no doubts on this score whatever. They could see nothing at all in the argument that the present possessor

of property that belongs morally, if not legally, to the State, having been permitted to grow up in the belief that what the law sanctioned must necessarily be right, is not quite fairly treated if he is quite suddenly turned into the streets without resources, and his property confiscated.

One would not dispute for a moment the principle that nobody should possess luxuries or even superfluous comforts until the elementary needs of everybody have been amply satisfied and secured ; or that a royal palace is put to much better use when it shelters many industrious persons than when it houses a king's mistress and her lackeys. But there is a difference as great as between black and white and right and wrong, between the declared will of the majority of the citizens acting through their National Assembly or Parliament which, in the interest of the community dispossesses an individual but secures the future of his wife and children as well as himself, and the arbitrary action of the minority in power, who roughly confiscate without consideration for the dispossessed.

" Where is the owner of this beautiful house ? " I asked several times, but I could get no reply. Nobody knew. I heard the story of a Princess Narishkin who was doing good work for the children under the Soviet, but do not know if it was true. One heard so many contradictory

stories. If true, was she happy, I wondered? It might conceivably be so. The old revolutionary movement in Russia was by no means a one-class movement. Many of the old régime have willingly consented to the confiscation of their estates and goods and are content to do hard work for the new Republic. In such cases no question of right or wrong arises. These are rare souls.

Before the end of the visit I met an old man who was the millionaire owner of a great line of steamships before the Revolution. The Revolution had completely dispossessed him. I found him quite content and happy about it. He formed part of the secretariat of an important Committee on Communications and travelled regularly as a Government employé on his own ships. His one grievance was the way in which the inventory of his fortune had been taken. He felt that his revolutionary record might have secured him more considerate treatment in the method of taking over his enterprises; but even on this point he was entirely without bitterness.

In Astrakhan we met the owner of a great fish-curing industry, who had yielded up everything to the Republic without a murmur, and who declared himself happier making nets along with his former workpeople than he had ever been in his life.

I slipped quickly into my bed that first night in Petrograd and tried to sleep and forget the ghost my self-questioning had raised ; but sleep refused to come. It was not because no darkness came and the pale light streamed in through the unshaded windows. It was not altogether the lack of privacy, though the fact that one's room was regarded as a public highway through which the men and women of the household tramped indiscriminately whenever they chose was, to say the least of it, disconcerting. I felt like a guilty thing, lying uninvited by its owner in that soft, white bed, whilst the poor creature who once occupied it might be sleeping on straw. I dozed ; and inevitably cold, sad eyes in a thin, hungry-looking face would gaze at me with the look of any woman whose house had been entered by intruders she was powerless to put outside.

I tried very hard to control my imagination, but it was very difficult. Cruelty is one of the vices which madden one. When we rode in the late Czar's motor-car, I did not feel the presence of my fellow-delegates, but the ghosts of the murdered unhappy little man and his family. The car was a thing of beauty, large and luxurious. Without it one could have seen very little. But the perfect joy of using it was marred by two things—the sight of the sore and undressed feet

of many of the weary proletarians of Moscow who had not the means even for a tram-ride, much less a ride in an automobile or a droshky ; and by the obvious joy and satisfaction with which those who accompanied us on our investigations regarded the capture of the Czar's car as an emblem of a cruel triumph.

" Whenever you are tempted to feel concerned about the execution of the Czar and his family," said a friendly Communist, " think about the millions of innocent human beings who have recently lost their lives through the policies of that man and his ministers. And call to your mind the vast hosts of martyrs who have fallen victims to the cruelties of his predecessors."

The advice was well-meant but unnecessary. I have already said that it would be impossible to forget the martyrs of the Revolution and the tortures of those grand idealists of Russia. The visit in Petrograd to the graves of some of them is an incident in a wide experience in many countries, the memory of which will stay with me to the end of my days. It was so sincere, yet so dramatic.

A large open space in the heart of the city called the Field of Mars, and devoted in the old times to military reviews and the drilling of troops, is being converted by the Communists into a fine memorial of the heroes of the Revolution who have

lost their lives in some prominent fashion in the struggle for freedom. Voluntary labour and the labour of the Red Army is digging up the hard soil and planting beautiful trees in symmetrical designs. In the middle of this large tract a simple stone memorial has been erected. It is not a flaunting column shouting to the sky, but it takes the form of a low, solid, granite wall, enclosing in four sections with rounded corners a burial ground. The spaces between the sections permit people to enter. From all parts of Russia the bodies have been brought and are laid just inside the wall and all the way round. A footpath follows the wall and encloses the graves on the other side. The centre of the square is at present a grass-plot with flowers and shrubs. The whole thing is naturally on a very large scale.

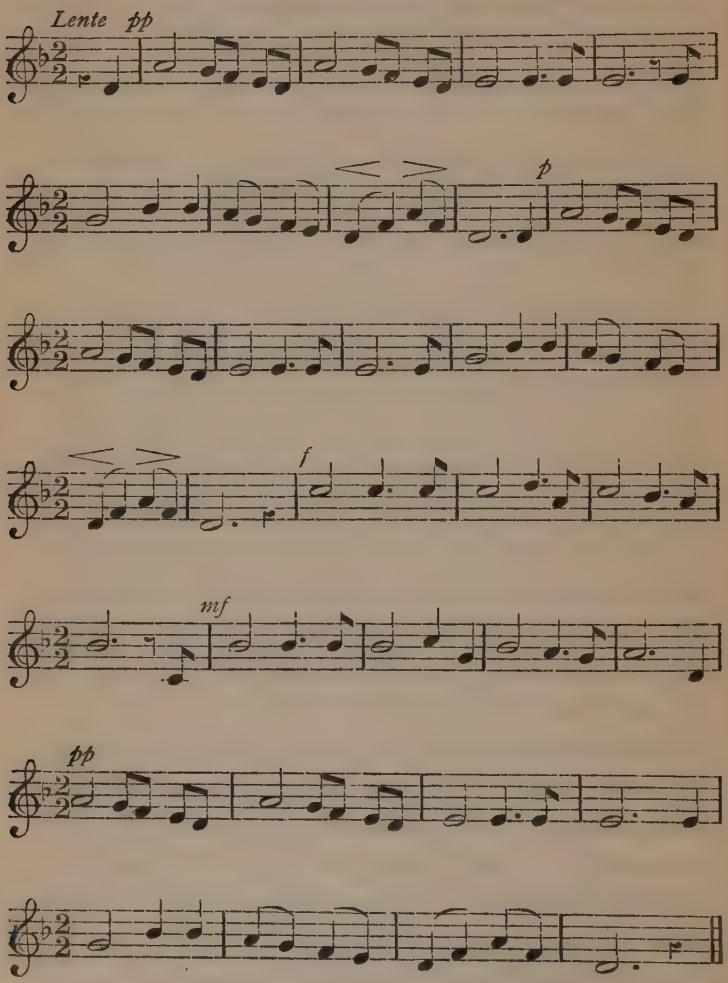
One lovely evening, after a most enthusiastic gathering inside the People's Hall, we were taken in a decorated tramcar to see the Martyrs' Memorial. I have experienced nothing in my life so moving and impressive. A great crowd from the meeting accompanied us, and stood in silent groups outside the wall whilst we walked slowly round. The eyes of the leaders shone with the light of a great pride and a deep passion as they approached one by one the graves of their honoured dead. The pride melted into tears at

some of the graves, when we stopped in our walk and sang slowly a verse of the plaintive martyrs' hymn, a sad and haunting melody with just a single note of triumph in it. One after another the heroes were pointed out to us. Here was a man who had been tortured to death. Here was one who was shot by hired Government assassins. Here lay one who was blown to bits by his own bomb ; here a tender girl who gave up her life for the cause.

The tears were quickly dried. Russian revolutionaries do not weep easily. Instead of tears a hard glitter filled the eyes of a fierce fellow. " But we will be avenged," he shouted. " For every one of our comrades who has died like this we will send ten of the bourgeois to their graves." I shuddered in the presence of a terrible fanaticism. Poor ghosts ! If they could rise from the dead would they not tell us to make no more human sacrifices to their memory ? Would they not speak to us of a better way ?

I tried hard to get a copy of the mournful song we sang on this and many occasions subsequently. I was several times promised it but it never came. The words I never knew for they were Russian, but the melody I captured and I give it as it printed itself upon my mind. It will be recognised by Russian readers.

SONG OF THE MARTYRS



This habit of seeing ghosts brought me a good deal of chaff not only from the Communists but from my own friends. One of the Communists made a speech in defence of violent methods and gave a sidelook at me when he reminded the British Delegates that " once on a time the British Government made its king shorter by a head," as did the people of France.

" It is quite true," I said afterwards to a group of Communists who were discussing with us the meeting. " King Charles the First was executed three hundred years ago in England. But it was after a proper trial by the recognised Courts of Justice. He was found guilty of the charges laid against him. And we did not shoot his wife and children. But if the idea of his execution was to get rid of kings it was the wrong way ; for kings we have still with us. And they will remain with us so long as the king-idea continues to be acceptable to the human mind. The Allies will never destroy the idea of Communism with their guns. The Communists can never destroy the idea of kingship and capitalism with their scaffolds. Only a good idea can slay a bad one. Only by proving that there is more manliness in democracy than autocracy, and more morality in Communism than in capitalism will the one institution give way to the other."

Of course I spoke to people who could never

be convinced in a thousand years of argument. Neither could they understand the distinction one made between the system and the individual. To them all is the same. And individuals must be made responsible for the suffering which is caused by the system, even though they may themselves be tender and pitiful, and innocent of wrong.

It was the great point of difference which separated spiritually my hosts and me. "You can never build a permanent system on hate," I said again and again; but they believe they can. And because of this belief they have no pity to spare for the innocent children of a hated monarch and his foolish, fanatical wife, all shot in the name of Authority for the crime of being themselves.

Their poor ghosts flitted in and out of the compartments in the train which was lent to us in our journey from Saratov to Reval, the train belonging to the Czar's daughters. And following them, in tragic sequence, the endless procession of ghosts tramping their way through the snows to Siberia to the crack of the Cossack whips.

Russia is full of ghosts.

CHAPTER IV

Investigation or Propaganda?

PEOPLE in Russia appear to be able to live without sleep. At any rate they never go to bed before the small hours of the morning. Very rarely were we allowed to go to our rooms before two o'clock, and it was frequently three o'clock in the morning. On entering Russia we were asked to alter our watches by three hours, making the time so much in advance of English time, and we used to console ourselves that it was " really only midnight " when, almost too weary to stand, we staggered to our rooms at this terribly un-English hour. Soon we became quite used to the sight of little children playing about at eleven and twelve at night, and to the spectacle of a ploughman ploughing his land at an hour when it was difficult to say whether twilight or the dawn lighted his labours. The hour of rising is correspondingly late, and breakfast was seldom served earlier than 9.30 or 10 o'clock.

The first meal at a Russian table was naturally to be a matter of interest to us. At this, the first,

and at all subsequent meals, there was an ample supply, though not a riotous abundance, of very simple food. Every nerve had been strained to make the change from profusion to scarcity as easy as possible. It was realised that it takes a long time to get used to black bread after white, thin soup after thick, and imitation tea after the real thing.

Real tea and coffee are well-nigh unprocurable in Russia at present. Yet they procured these for the British guests. These good things came to us, we were informed, because great stores of them had been captured from Judenitch who had received them through the British War Office. For our hosts this fact added a piquancy to their hospitality, which a sufficiently developed sense of humour enabled us to understand.

Our breakfast consisted of a sufficient supply of brown bread, hard but not unpleasant to the taste, butter and thin slices of cheese. On alternate mornings we had smoked fish or slices of ham. There was abundance of tea served in glasses from the samovar, with sugar but no milk. Occasionally there was coffee. We were served by a dignified "tovarisch" (*tovarisch* is Russian for "comrade") who looked as though he were a typical English butler, and who, I was credibly informed, actually was a relic of the old régime. His was a stolid, grave face, as became the

servant of departed princes. What his thoughts were as he moved quietly about the room I would have given many roubles to know.

At the head of the table, our brilliant little hostess in Petrograd, sat Madame Angelica Balabanov. This lady is one of the most wonderful linguists I have ever met. She seems to have all the languages on the tip of her tongue. She is a speaker of enormous power and eloquence, so eloquent indeed, and so fiery, that I am certain, given the right kind of human material to work upon, she could make a revolution by herself. Small wonder the Soviet Government wished to make her their ambassador to Rome. No wonder at all that the Italians were too frightened to have her. She loves Italy passionately. She looks like an Italian with her dark skin, mysterious glowing eyes and twin plaits of long black hair reaching far below her waist when uncoiled ; and with this appearance and her magic tongue, she might soon have won the Italians for Bolshevism. She is one of the kindest of women in all normal relationships. But I could well imagine her destroying her best friend for the glory of Bolshevism, should such a sacrifice appear to be necessary.

After that first breakfast the Delegation met in the bedroom of the chairman to discuss our programme and the plans which we saw had been prepared for us, and the methods of investigation

we proposed to adopt. There was a division of opinion about the latter, which hinged upon the propriety or otherwise of delivering ourselves into the hands of our hosts.

In numerous speeches, both public and private, we had been assured not only of the warmth of our welcome, but of the intention of the Bolsheviki to let us see everything—good, bad and indifferent. "We have nothing whatever to hide, so why should you not be free to go where you will and see what you wish." This sounded splendid. We heaved a sigh of relief. We had been in mortal terror of being a conducted party.

The theory was, therefore, that we were to go where we pleased and see what we chose and speak to whom we desired to speak; in short, to have perfect freedom. But in practice this freedom was every whit as illusory as the raising of the British blockade. As events transpired, we were everywhere accompanied by representatives of the Authorities, who were sent, it was said, partly to act as interpreters and partly to protect us from counter-revolutionaries and Polish spies who might be lurking about with bombs! The number of such persons who accompanied us on most of our visits, whether to inspect a factory or a workshop or to interview a Commissar, was seldom less than half a dozen and generally was ten or even twenty. Sometimes as many as fifty people by

actual count accompanied us round a factory. They got fearfully in the way, and often crowded out members of the Delegation eager to get close to charts and maps and anxious to ask questions. But we were all very good-humoured about this, because we realised that this was the first time for for five years that these people had been permitted to look upon the face of the foreigner, and that a perfectly natural curiosity was entitled to be satisfied.

It was not so much the number of persons who accompanied us that was the trouble, although this host of followers gave our enterprise a circus-like quality which some of us would have been glad to exchange for a more business-like atmosphere. There is certainly a lack of freedom in the feeling that one is being watched all the time, and one's words and actions and the people with whom one speaks noted by gentlemen who hold positions in Government service, either in connection with the Foreign Office or the Extraordinary Commission, as was the case with several of our closest attendants.

But there were other factors which operated to place a check upon our activities.

In the first place a programme of places to be visited and things to be seen was presented to us which, if carried out only in part, would have absorbed every second of our time and lessened

still further the number of hours to be devoted to sleep. The time-tables given to us when we entered Petrograd and Moscow were simply staggering. "Can human beings go through that and live?" we asked one another. We thought we began to see some of the reasons why Russian men and women look ten years older than they are—no sleep, too much tea, and this sort of thing! Needless to say, we edited those programmes with much firmness and vigour. And even so, some of us found it extremely difficult to get as much time to ourselves as was necessary to take a bath or darn a sock.

Another curious fact speedily unfolded itself. The real nature of our mission to Russia appeared not to be understood. It was believed, or the belief was affected, that we had come in the spirit of full agreement with them, whereas we were there to enquire and to inform ourselves. It was frequently suggested, both privately and publicly, that "the representatives of the revolutionary working-class movement in Great Britain had come to bring greetings and assistance to the revolutionary Government of Russia." From this belief, or the affectation of it, sprang the clever notion of using us in every possible way to advance their propaganda. Immense public demonstrations, both indoor and outdoor, at which we were expected to make speeches were already arranged

for us when we arrived there. We were never consulted about our desires in the matter. There were enormous military parades and Trade Union marches, which we were made to watch from a high platform, where we became the easy victims of the Government Press photographer and the moving picture operator.

On several occasions members of the Delegation addressed the troops in language eminently satisfying to the Bolshevik Commissars, and those like myself, who declined to do this on the ground that we had not come for such a purpose, became objects of suspicion and of quiet dislike. Dinners and suppers followed each other in quick succession, at which the soon-to-be-familiar revolutionary toasts were made the occasion for more speeches. We were displayed in the box of the late Czar at the Opera to interested spectators numbering several thousands on each occasion both in Petrograd and Moscow. The way in which our clever hosts contrived to place us under a very real and lasting obligation by their generous regard for our physical welfare during the whole period of our visit, and at the same time to extract from us for their own purposes the last ounce of propaganda usefulness excited my warmest admiration.

As propagandists there is surely no race and no class to surpass the Russian Communists. At

such work they are simply superb. I am quite convinced from my own observation that they have won their victories on the battlefield far more through their leaflets than their bullets. The propaganda trains they are sending daily to the Polish front are marvels of ingenuity. Inside and outside these trains are covered with vivid pictures portraying side by side the horrors of Capitalism and the glories of Communism in simple intelligible form, the horrid capitalist murdering the poor peasant or standing triumphant over a dying woman and child, whilst Communist fields bursting with grain yield to the sickle of the happy, sun-browned, well-fed harvester. Posters giving simple but effective figures, making glowing promises, or issuing electric appeals to the proletariat to " rise and shake off the hated chains of the bourgeoisie " decorate these railway carriages through the whole of their length. Over the Polish lines burst shrapnel cases filled with leaflets. Or they scatter Russian passports for all the Poles who wish to desert and come over the lines.

The value of propaganda on a big scale for the prosecution of its aims was discovered by the Government in Great Britain during the war. Large sums of public money were spent upon it. Against this use of the taxes British Socialists protested with warmth and unanimity as a

violation of personal rights. But not so would the Communists have acted. The Government of Russia conducts such operations on an incredible scale. Whole buildings of great size are stuffed from floor to ceiling with pamphlets and leaflets printed in every well-used language in the world, and a tireless and powerful propaganda in the principles of Communism is carried on at the expense of the Russian State in every country in the world to which Bolshevist agents have access. Here is the last sentence in the section devoted to Education in the Communist Manifesto of 1919 :

> " To develop the propaganda of Communist ideas on a wide scale, and for that purpose, *of taking advantage of the State means and apparatus.*"

Our first public reception in Petrograd was at a dinner given to us by the Petrograd Soviet. It was held in a great room which had formerly been a stable but had been converted into the hall of a very fine public assembly-room. All along the walls were banners specially prepared for our coming, on some of which were sentences in English, tendering us good advice on the lines of " Go thou and do likewise." Some of the thoughts so advertised were very fine, and one I cannot refrain from mentioning, representing as

it does all that is best and finest in the Communist idea: "We are working for the children, for the future, for humanity." This is a much bigger conception than the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which is a very big and very important section, but only a section of "humanity."

As we entered the long passage which led to this dining-hall we heard in the distance the strains of "The Internationalé." Alas, I thought, we are guilty of the rudeness of being late. Not at all! This was simply the orchestra getting itself into form. As we entered, it burst forth again with joyful hilarity. We stood by our seats till the end, and then proceeded to talk to our neighbours. For the third time the band broke into the strain. Some members of our party had strolled in late. It was essential that they should have a royal reception also. We settled down once more. Suddenly everybody started to his feet again. It was "The Internationalé" for the fifth time, sung to welcome the President of the Soviet to his chair. Then came the food, and, at intervals, the speeches. After each speech came "The Internationalé," and whatever we were doing, eating or speaking, it had to cease until the National Anthem of the world-proletariat, if I may so describe it, had been sung. And a curiously amusing feature of this singing was, that it indicated the degree of approval conferred upon the

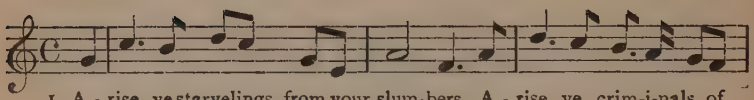
speech. If the speech were a blood-red revolutionary speech in the recognised style, the whole of the three verses was sung. If the speech were of a quieter pattern, two verses followed. If, as happened in one case, the speech kept close to the facts of the situation and lacked vim, one verse only was its reward. All this may have happened without design, but it happened so. And anyhow, we learnt the tune of "The Internationalé" unforgettably that night, for it was sung whole or in part, exactly seventeen times !

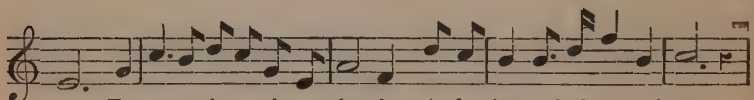
"Are you not afraid," I asked, of a Communist who was near me, "that the people will get tired of that song if you sing it so often ? I can imagine nothing more tiresome to the ears of our king than the public prayer for his salvation put up for him every time he pays a public call."

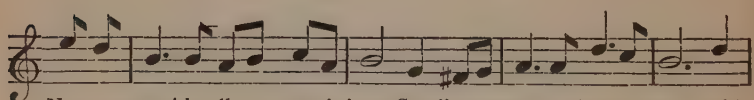
"Why, yes," he replied, "the people are a little tired of it ; but it is necessary to supersede the old National Anthem and such songs as are associated with the old order, and instil into them revolutionary melodies. It is good propaganda."

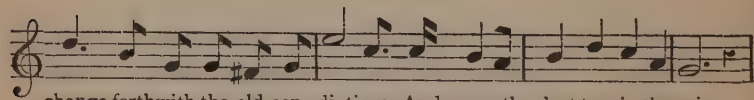
Shades of the departed ! Will the music of the country also be sacrificed to the insatiable spirit of Karl Marx ?

THE INTERNATIONALÉ

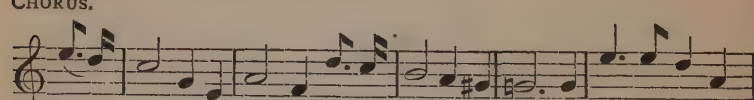


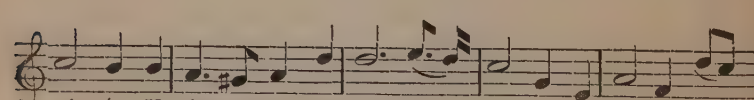


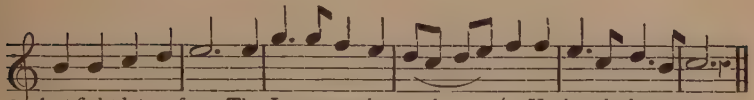




CHORUS.







2. These kings defile us with their powder,
We want no war within the land ;
Let soldiers strike : for peace call louder,
Lay down arms and join hand in hand.
Should these vile monsters still determine,
Heroes to make us in despite ;
They'll know full soon the kind of vermin
Our bullets hit in this last fight !

CHORUS : Then comrades, etc.

CHAPTER V

The Communists

ACCOMPANYING the British Delegation were two British journalists, one representing a great Liberal daily and the other a well-known Radical weekly journal. At Reval we were joined by an American writer. Later a French and an Italian journalist were added to the number. Later still came a German writer on the scene; and in addition a considerable number of Swedes and Norwegians who had come to Russia to make a special study of industrial life, with a view to organising assistance from Sweden of the various big constructive plans contemplated by the Russian Government. We were all housed under the same roof, fed at the same tables, carried about in the same fleet of automobiles and subjected to the same supervision during the visit to Petrograd and Moscow.

Radios sent out by delegates and journalists were censored by the Authorities, who have sole control of all the means of communication with the outer world, a very natural state of affairs in

a country at war with so many enemies. Very natural, also, is it that in this, as in other ways, the Russian Government should exactly copy the methods of other Governments in selecting for world-distribution those messages which tell in its favour. It must certainly be conceded in their behalf that never in the history of mankind has the public Press been used to pervert the truth and exaggerate the evil more than for the purposes of destroying the detested Communist régime.

But of this monopoly of the wires by the Government we were ourselves occasionally the victims, the smiling and amused victims I may say ; as when a fiery speech on true Bolshevist lines by an eloquent Britisher, unable to resist his atmosphere, was flashed around the world, whilst a more sober utterance was treated with contemptuous disregard.

I remember one little incident which caused those of us who were aware of it the greatest entertainment as evidencing the methods of some of the more timid and consequently the more autocratic of the Communists. The representative of the *Daily News* and the American journalist wished to extend their trip on the Volga and to go down to Astrakhan. To do this it was necessary to have permission from the Foreign Office. They drew up a telegram and

handed it to the Commissioner in charge of our party, who smilingly assured them that the telegram should be sent and that they might expect the reply in a few hours. They waited. The point at which the Delegation was to leave the ship and return to Moscow was reached. They approached the Commissioner and asked him if there were any news for them.

" The message was sent at once, but no reply has come ; therefore it is impossible for you to stay on the ship " he replied in good French, lying without a wink. Their message had never been sent to Moscow !

Red Petrograd is very proud of its name. The reason why it is " redder " than Moscow is due in all probability to the fact that, as the capital city and the place of residence of the Czars, it has been the scene of more revolutionary propaganda and anarchist intrigues than any other single city in the wide dominions of Russia. Add to this the terrors of the blockade, the invasion by Judenitch, who crept very close to the city, and the very fearful sufferings of Petrograd during the war and there is sufficient to explain the more terrible reaction. The marked despotism and even cruelty of the men in power in Petrograd became noticeable to us before we left. A brief conversation with one Communist there lingers in my mind.

"There is a rivalry between Moscow and Petrograd," he informed me "which threatens to become something very serious."

"Very much like the rivalry between Manchester and Liverpool or Lancashire and Yorkshire, I suppose?" was my reply.

"Not in the very least" was his answer. "Perhaps rivalry is not the right word. Rather is it a conflict; or only a rivalry in the sense of striving to keep the Communist ideal untarnished."

I was interested, and bade him continue.

"There are certain elements in Moscow which are still tainted with the spirit of compromise. Even Lenin himself is not above suspicion. There is a great and growing opposition to Lenin in Red Petrograd. We do not like his tenderness for the interests of foreign concessionaires. We do not approve of the toleration shown in Moscow to the counter-revolutionary Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. It is necessary we yield nothing to those who are not fully with us in our programme and our methods. These traitors will undermine the fabric of the Communist Republic. Lenin himself must go if this is his way."

The man was a bitter and gloomy fanatic. But his words were interesting. "You do not suggest that Lenin is seeking compromise for his own ends, do you?" I asked, unwilling that

anything so squalid should fasten itself to the reputation of one of the most amazing personalities the war has produced. I was promptly reassured on that point.

" Oh, no, indeed no," was his answer. " Lenin is pure. He seeks nothing for himself. But he is making mistakes. The influences in Moscow are not good. Here we are strong. Red Petrograd is different from Moscow."

So I learnt first, and afterwards was confirmed in the knowledge, that there are several varieties of Communists in Russia, and that to criticise those in power at present is not by any means to be an opponent of Communism. Everybody is behind the Government at present, because of the war. Soldiers and statesmen of the old régime who have not fled ; literary men like Gorky ; bourgeois citizens who remain in Russia are serving the Government, and every variety of Socialist, hating the methods of the Communist with a deadly hatred, is none the less tacitly behind it so long as the country is in danger from outside aggression.

Men like Kameneff, Sverdloff and Krassin, who hold high and responsible positions in the State service, good and sincere Communists, would not rise to power nor maintain their position by indiscriminate slaughter and brutal methods of tyranny, but having faith in the ultimate triumph

of their principle, would establish it through education and organisation. That men of a more violent character hold the reins of power is due, in my considered judgment, to the fatal policy of the Allies, and in these days, of the Poles, in seeking to decide the issue by the sword. The resumption of war by the misguided Poles and the consequent fear that fell upon the Russian people, joined to a perfectly proper patriotism, gave that powerful instrument of tyranny, the Extraordinary Commission, with its secret police, the opportunity to revive itself, and fasten itself like the plague upon terror-stricken population and frightened administrators alike.

But the extreme men, with their gospel of a world-revolution by violence, and the dictatorship of one class over the rest of mankind, are a painful phenomenon. Pure and unselfish idealists as many of them undoubtedly are, and born out of due time, they are the terrible progeny of the maddest war and the cruellest " peace " that ever tore civilisation to tatters.

Some work quietly, live nobly, and starve on the rations which only the very best men decline to augment. But, for the most part, the Communists live better than the rest and form the new aristocracy. Their duties are specially dangerous and hazardous, and the difference is justified for this reason. If there is an epidemic to be fought

or special labour to be performed, the Communists are the first to be called upon to do the work; but there are privileges also, as with the aristocracy of any other country. Of the civilian population, Communists only may carry arms. Special food and clothing privileges are made available for Communists. The children of Communists form the greater number in the country colonies for children. The way to professional advancement and to positions of power and responsibility is through the Communist Party. This fact may explain the position within the Party of one able man with whom I spoke. I had been trying to convince a little Communist lady that there was no Communist Party as such in Great Britain and that the number of Communists in England was very small.

"There are no published statistics, but," I said, "I do not believe there are five thousand Communists in the whole of England. I doubt if there are five hundred Communists there who have thought the thing out to the very bottom, and who give to Communism anything more than an emotional support."

"And do you really think there are more than five thousand or even five hundred Communists of the better sort in this country?" was his question.

"Indeed I do," I replied. "I believe that there

are 650,000 Communists according to your own published statistics."

"Published statistics are queer things," he said slowly. "It is not easy to join the Communist Party. There is six months' probation to be served. One has to have two guarantors. But when joining the Party is the only sure way to sufficient nourishment and some prospect of advancement, even the dangerous duties cannot deter all from joining." He shrugged his shoulders and walked away. He, along with the rest of the Trade Unionists, had been ordered under threat of penalties to join the parade in the Uritzky Platz which had been organised for the British Delegation.

The first public meeting in Petrograd and a similar occasion in the Moscow Opera House were like every other meeting we had in Russia. The slight difference between these two gatherings was that in Petrograd the audience was restricted to Trade Unionists as the hall-space was limited to about two thousand, and the meeting was held under the auspices of the Unions, whilst in Moscow the meeting was open to the general public and was three times as big as in Petrograd.

Speeches were made by Russians and British alternately. At the Moscow meeting a Menshevik was permitted to speak, and made a plucky performance under very trying circumstances.

The Russian official speeches were all of one quality and directed towards very definite ideas. These speeches soon became so familiar that we learnt to anticipate the phrases. When a little boy of ten was brought forward at one of the schools to repeat to us his Communist lesson, we recognised the words of the father on the lips of the child. There was the same talk of the dictatorship of the working masses, the same passionate appeal to the British workers to drop their old method and march into the streets and to the barricades, the same prophecies of a world-revolution, the same sneers at those who hope to achieve their object by peaceful and democratic means, the same wearisome exclamatory phrases at the end. "Long live the Soviet Republic!" "Long live the Workers Revolution!" "Long live the international solidarity of Labour!" Admirable phrases were some of these, but incongruous in the mouth of a pale little fellow of ten, undersized on his cabbage soup and black bread; and unspeakably funny tripping from the unaccustomed lips of sober-speeched Britons, anxious not to be outdone in the delivery of explosive perorations. "Long live Soviet Russia!" "Long live the Russian Communist Party!" "Long live the Workers Revolution!"

A few phrases from the speeches of the Russian

orators will illustrate the kind of message they wished to give us and will show the misunderstanding of our mission and of the state of the Labour Movement in Great Britain of which I wrote in a previous chapter. To take the following sentences from a speech delivered by Ziperovitch, of the Trades Union Council of the Province of Petrograd :

" It is with a feeling of deep satisfaction that the Russian Trades Union Council notices that the mighty pressure of the British Revolutionary Movement has at last made the Government of Lloyd George give up the police methods (as the refusal of passports) so degrading to the British proletariat."

Was it, I wonder, the " mighty pressure of the British Revolutionary Movement " which accomplished this ? Or was it due to the Prime Minister's desire to begin the movement for happier relations with Russia ? Take another phrase :

" I am deeply convinced that the visit of our British comrades is a promising symbol of the great moral upheaval in that country."

Knowing as I did the ideas about the British Labour Movement they have in mind in Russia, I felt it incumbent upon me for the sake of the Russians themselves, to disabuse them of the notion that there is any evidence worthy of

the name to show that the British workers are within appreciable distance of using Communist methods of violence for what, in some respects, is a oneness of *ultimate* ideal ; but that history, tradition, temperament, training and the great fact of our comparative freedom and prosperity all precluded the hope on their part of entering together upon the last decisive fight for world revolution.

From the speech of Losowsky, also a Trade Union leader, I have selected the following phrases to show the aim of the Bolshevik leaders :

" The Labour movement of Russia stands determinedly and definitely for the Social Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Social Revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat."

" The working class has taken the power into its own hands and with fire and sword annihilates all who seek to turn Russian history backward."

" No compromise. Merciless war on the bourgeoisie to the victorious end."

The terrible danger of this inflammatory talk lies in the fact that the deeds of the Communists in power march with their words, and as every person who ventures to disagree in the slightest particular with the principles of the Party is regarded as a traitor, he comes under the suspicion of the Authorities and goes about daily in fear of being denounced and punished as a counter-revolutionary.

But for many of these bitter men, much excuse may be made when the facts of their lives are known. Many of them have been the greatest sufferers from the tyranny of the Czardom. Many of them have had long terms of imprisonment or exile, have suffered from the knout or the bayonet, have been sentenced to death and escaped, or have lost health and happiness in Siberian wilds. Six years in solitary confinement does not tend to sweeten a man's outlook on life. Fourteen years in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, with the daily terror of being taken out of his cell and shot, does not make for sweetness and light. Outrage and torture of women very naturally hardens them and forms into a thin cruel line many of the lips made to press tender kisses on the foreheads of little children. Very few of the Communist leaders of Russia there are who have not had to endure one or all of these hideous experiences. That they should be infected, unconsciously to themselves, by the virus of cruelty is not to be wondered at. And the greater part of the blame for all that has happened and is happening to the opponents of unadulterated Communism must be laid upon the shoulders of those who, by promoting wars, civil and foreign, have made their task of government impossibly hard.

CHAPTER VI

The Artistic Life of Russia

ALMOST everybody in Russia is hungry and cold, and many surface critics in Russia blame the Government for conditions for which they cannot be held in any great degree responsible. It is perfectly true that in the beginning, Committee management of an industry sometimes brought that industry to a full stop. Kameneff is reported by Arthur Ransome to have explained the non-working of certain excellent soap factories on the double ground of lack of material and " because some crazy fool imagined that to take an inventory you must bring everything to a standstill." " Establish a Commission," he had previously said, " and soap instantly disappears. But put in one man to see that soap is forthcoming, and somehow or other we get it." The greater part of the blame for the hunger and privation must be placed upon those who made the wars which have afflicted Russia so long.

Nobody can criticise the Government on one point, and that their protection and encouragement of Art. The most grudging in his praise

must perforce admit that the Bolsheviki have shown their wisdom in leaving undamaged up to the present the artistic side of Russian life; whilst the just will give them credit for fostering Art by taking special care of the artists and by bringing it within the reach of the poorest classes in the community, hitherto totally shut out from the best and finest which Art can give.

The concert halls and theatres of Petrograd and Moscow are crowded every night. The British Delegation were taken several times to the most wonderful performances of plays and operas it has been the lot of most of them to see. I have myself seen operatic performances in several European capitals, London and New York. It is true that the orchestra in Vienna is finer. " Die Götterdämmerung " as performed in Berlin excites the greatest admiration. Chaliapine himself has thrilled immense audiences in Covent Garden. The singing and orchestration in the two great Russian cities were very fine indeed, perhaps not so fine as special performances in the other European capitals in happier circumstances. But in the mere technique of production I have seen nothing to equal the Russian performances. Not a detail had been neglected, not a dress, nor a colour, nor a pose unstudied. The lighting effects were astonishing. Here, a moon gave a moon's light, and a daybreak came as

gently and softly as in Nature, and not with the suddenness of breaking china.

In Petrograd we saw two performances, one Gluck's " Orpheus " and the other Bizet's " Carmen." In addition we had an hour at the ballet on our way to the railway train and Moscow. The ballet is known in London for the exquisite thing it is. A special interest for us in Petrograd was the inclusion in the caste of gifted proletarian children, whose dancing did nothing to lower the standard in these things to which Russia has accustomed the rest of Europe for so long. It was a very lovely rendering of the dream of a hopeless lover of his princess-bride, who dies of grief and shock when the vision fades and he is left with nothing but her veil of gauze.

Of " Carmen " I have seen a better performance from the point of view of chorus singing and orchestral accompaniment. There was a disturbing failure to keep together of chorus and orchestra which marred an otherwise wonderful presentation of this well-known and favourite opera. But again, the way in which it was staged was marvellous beyond all words. And similarly with " Orpheus." This wonderful work, rendered with exquisite art, developed in one a mood of exaltation, and left one with the feeling that here in the world of mystery and imagination, of passionate and pure aspiration are the things

which matter most, and that the sordid battles of political theorists for intellectual victories and argumentative triumphs are of very secondary importance.

One or two of the Delegates went to the green room between the scenes to discover how far the new order of Society was satisfying to the artists. One of the chief of these was asked if he experienced as much sympathy and appreciation from the new type of audience as the old, and whether he liked singing to the new as well as to the old. He replied that to him the social position of the members of his audience did not matter ; that the mere appendages of the old-time theatre, the dresses, the fans, the flowers and other fripperies meant nothing at all ; that understanding and sympathy were everything to the singer, and that in these things, there was no difference between the old and the new.

The audiences were certainly very attentive and most appreciative. They were composed in the main of quiet working folk and professional men and women. There were very few good clothes, but everybody was neat and tidy except about the feet. The only thing I noticed which seemed to indicate that many in the audience were new to the music was the applause when the curtain descended and before the orchestra finished. The " clappers " were reproved by the

more instructed part of the audience, and will probably learn in time to respect the music till the end. And anyhow, I have seen in London theatres exhibitions of bad manners from people who fussed with their hats and cloaks during the last moments of the play or concert, infinitely harder to endure than the premature enthusiasm of the new opera-goers in Petrograd.

Certain nights at the Opera and theatre are reserved for soldiers and sailors, certain others for Trade Unionists and other workers, and the remainder are for the general public. The public pay for their places, the workers go in free. The tickets are distributed to them in turn through their organisations. So great is the demand for tickets that many people are able to sell theirs at double the price, which they frequently do, preferring the extra money to the music; whilst cunning speculators buy up quantities of tickets and make a profitable deal with them.

But the outstanding fact remains: That Opera and the best music and plays are accessible to all, free to most, and that Art is tenderly nurtured under the Soviet administration.

Artists are able to command big salaries in roubles, which, however, are not really big salaries when compared with those offered by foreign syndicates. Chaliapine, we were told by a Commissar, is able to earn two hundred thousand

roubles in one night. But when it is borne in mind that ten thousand roubles can be bought for an English pound and that £20 is the nightly sum commanded by one of the greatest singers who ever lived, it is not so outrageous a reward as the little Commissar appeared to think. It is, of course, very large when compared with the two thousand to eight thousand roubles which (in round figures) is the salary scale per month of the Trade Unions of Russia. Sometimes the artists are paid in kind. The men and women who sang and danced for our entertainment at the dinner in Petrograd were paid in white flour, a much valued commodity; and were paid well.

During the big interval in the first opera in Moscow, a performance of "Prince Igor," an interesting thing happened: Trotsky came into the anteroom to see the Delegates. We all crowded round him eager to have the latest news from the Polish front from which he had just come and to which he was immediately returning. He had to tell of great victories over the Poles, and spoke with magnificent confidence of overwhelming success to the Red armies.

Trotsky made his name and fame in Europe as the greatest of pacifists and anti-militarists; but not in the garb of St. Francis did he enter our midst!

Physically he is a remarkably fine-looking man; a Jew, dark and keen, with penetrating eyes, and a quiet manner suggestive of enormous reserves of strength. He was in an officer's uniform, which fitted him extremely well. When one of the Delegates was presented to him as a conscientious objector who had served a term in prison for his faith, he turned quickly and said, though not unkindly: "We can have nobody here who preaches peace and wants to stop the war."

The bell rang, and with Trotsky in our midst we re-entered the box, the late Czar's place in the vast theatre. Trotsky took his place in the middle of the front row. I occupied the seat next to him on his right, and so was in a position to see everything that happened. As soon as the great audience caught a glimpse of Trotsky it rose like one man, and with wild enthusiasm applauded its hero again and again. Naturally we rose with the rest to pay our respects to the man who was leading in his country's battles and winning all the time. The cheers doubled and trebled. People shouted themselves hoarse. It was the most spontaneous thing I have ever seen. It was wonderful! And then a great burly sailor in the first gallery sprang to the front and led both orchestra and audience in the singing of "The Internationalé." It was the one great occasion on which we joined in the singing of this overworked

ditty with real and undiluted pleasure. This was because it was a natural bursting into song of a great gathering standing to welcome its conquering hero. It was a fine occasion.

Trotsky speaks only a very little English, but his French is fluent and he was well understood. I should think he is very fond of music, for he gave the closest and most serious attention to the performance.

At one point in the performance there came a tender love-scene.

"There," said Trotsky turning to me and speaking in English for the first time, "is the great international language."

"Yes," I replied, "you are right. But there is also another—Art. These two great international languages of Love and Art will unite the world in peace and happiness at last."

I should think Trotsky is a man of throbbing vitality and of strong feeling; once of splendid vision. The banner of international peace and good-will on the basis of those principles afterwards adopted by President Wilson, raised by Trotsky at Brest-Litovsk and since trampled upon by the militarists of the world, marked him then a man of superb ideals. He failed at Brest-Litovsk as Wilson failed at Paris. Only when the nations dream them can such dreams as these come true.

The Art Theatre in Moscow is supposed to stand alone in lofty pre-eminence amongst the world temples of Art. Men and women have come from the four corners of the world to see how the work there is done. We saw an old Russian drama enacted here, "Czar Feodor." It was done in the Russian language, but so perfect was the acting that the story unfolded itself easily before our eyes; and, so far as an understanding of the characters was concerned, we did not need the few notes in English courteously supplied to us by the management.

It is a small theatre, without ornamentation of any kind. The audience suggested a meeting of the Fabian Society in type, the middle-class intellectual predominating. From beginning to end there was no applause. It is the custom. Such fine art neither needs nor desires noisy approval. So exacting is the service of Art here that the Czar himself would not have been admitted before the interval had he been so discourteous as to come late.

There is another little theatre in Moscow some of us visited, which is developing along new lines, and which is leading a revolt against the old, dramatic forms. Here we saw a perfect riot of extravagant colour and design on Futurist lines. It was a mad story, madly told. Not to this place would the weary worker come after a day's

hard toil, unless the orgy of colour, the almost savage tilting at everything normal and conventional in stage-life and stage-production could contribute to the stimulation of tired nerve and body. The first impression was of a madhouse. On second thoughts we rather liked it. Finally, we rejoiced to know that the amiable Director is bringing his company to London as soon as matters can be satisfactorily arranged.

It was eleven o'clock when we left this theatre, but still fresh and fit we drove to a large house in a distant part of Moscow which was the home of a Russian countess, but at present is called the Palace of Arts, a club for intellectuals of the front rank. The countess is graciously permitted the use of two or three rooms in the building, but the rest is open to the members of the club and their guests. We "happened in" on a very pleasant occasion, the birthday celebration of one of Russia's most distinguished living poets, Belmont. A gentle little man, with grey hair and a pleasant smile, he extended to us the hand of friendship and bade us welcome in a warm speech. One of us replied suitably, and we then settled down to listen to the greetings in their own verse or song of the poet's brothers and sisters in the craft. All had something to give him besides their words, a kiss on the hand or the cheek, or a nosegay of flowers. It was very touching. It

showed us the old Art life of Russia still living in spite of the awful conditions.

But as we went out I caught sight of a man whose poor knee pushed its way through his torn garment, a poet whose fine eyes in a sunken face were full of pain. And in the lobby in front of me as I prepared to descend the grand old staircase was a woman in sables, though the night was hot, whose feet were bound in slippers of felt.

We drove home in the early morning, the last light of sunset contending with the first streaks of dawn. And I could not help wishing that the Communists would ask the lady of the house to step out of her rooms in the basement and consent to act as gentle hostess to these young and enthusiastic worshippers of Art who assembled nightly in her house.

The next day I discussed with a young, curly-headed Communist whose English was better than my own the wonders of art in Moscow.

"Yes, yes," he said, "We were never able to have anything like that in London. It cost too much. And the cheap seats were always full. It is very fine indeed. But let me whisper something," and here he gave a half-rueful, mischievous smile, "it would be good to see and hear dear old George Robey again!"

CHAPTER VII

The Military Power of Russia

IT is fondly to be hoped that when these words come to be printed, peace between Russia and Poland will have been satisfactorily established. The need of Europe and the world for a real peace and the awful possibilities of the alternative ought to be the subject of everybody's prayer and the impulse to everybody's endeavour until peace becomes an accomplished fact.

The situation as it now stands is this. The Russians have everywhere defeated the Poles, as they told us they would, and are threatening to move on Warsaw. The Poles have cried to the Allies for help. The Allies have sent a note to Russia asking for an armistice between Russia and Poland on certain well-defined terms. The Russians have replied carefully, expressing a desire for peace, but requesting the Poles themselves to sue for it, and promising them better terms than the Allies themselves suggest in the matter of their boundary line.

The territory claimed by the Poles and for

which they entered upon this foolish and wicked adventure is an area of about four hundred square miles, containing a population which is not ten per cent Polish. The remaining ninety per cent do not wish to belong to the Polish Empire. The claim of the Poles to this territory is of the shadowiest description and dates back to the time when the United States of America was still a part of the British Empire. Undoubtedly, the claim upon this land rests upon the ambition of the Poles to make it a jumping-off ground for an imperialist adventure which would establish Polish rule from Warsaw to Odessa. No Russian Government, whatever its name or quality, would accept such an arrangement, and it is the most natural thing in the world that the insolent campaign of Poland should have united behind the Soviet Republic every section of the Russian populace.

Although morally and legally in the right, and full of indignation at the unworthy part played by certain European statesmen and soldiers in the business, who have either openly or covertly, helped and encouraged the Poles, the Russian Government has repeatedly made efforts to conclude peace, and has offered to concede much of the Poles' outrageous claim in order to secure it. The Russians need so sorely to get on with their work of internal reconstruction that only the most

stupid blunderer could for a moment imagine they were eager for spoils and conquests. The last offer, which was made months ago, was to accept for an armistice the lines now occupied by the terrified Poles; but it was refused. The Allies were requested to temper the rapacity of Poland and help forward peace, but no attention was paid to this appeal. And now the victorious Russians are requested to stop fighting, to make peace on terms prepared for them by interested outsiders who have helped their foes, or to prepare to have brought against them the armed power of Great Britain and, it may be, the rest of the Allies. It is a preposterous situation, in which only the Russians occupy a position of credit. The invocation of the League of Nations by Great Britain, after the League had remained silent, whilst one of its members, Poland, played the pirate, has brought still greater contempt upon that poor ghost of the thing designed to help mankind.

One's whole sympathy is with the Russians. By every precedent established by history, by the precedent of every government engaged in the recent war, Russia would be entitled to march on and bid the Allies do their worst. But the best friends of Russia must hope that she will avoid the bad example of the rest of Europe and, in spite of great and sore temptation, choose the better way.

When we were in Moscow, we noted the passionate longing of the people for peace. It was clear that the majority of the men in power also wanted peace. But a minority existed which was totally indifferent to peace, whilst a few were glad of the war, since it united the masses of the population behind the extremer Communists at the head of the State. The policy towards Poland will depend upon which of the sections gets its way. If the moderate men win, the armistice will be concluded, and the terms will be generous. If the others gain the day, the war will go on until Poland consents to reform her Government on Bolshevist lines. In such case Lemberg and Warsaw will be occupied and the bourgeois population may suffer a hard fate.

But what an opportunity presents itself for reversing the thinking world's judgment of the men who are managing Russian affairs; or if not quite reversing it, of modifying it! For the choice of peace on fair terms will prove the Bolshevik commanders superior in international morals to any European Government engaged in the recent war. A government capable of such self-control and a people capable of such self-denial would go down into history as marking a new epoch. There would be a new faith in idealism born to Europe, which would help to undo the

cruel wrong to Faith and Hope dealt by the treaties miscalled of Peace.

Our experience of Russia fills us with mingled fear and hope. During the last two and a half years of bitter fighting the Russian Government has trained and equipped a magnificent army. Its navy is utterly devoted to it. In a sense the Revolution is the child of the navy, for the sailors brought the thing to birth. It is not possible to estimate the exact number of men in the active forces, but it is very large indeed, and it is a very different army from the ragged, ignorant, ill-equipped forces of the Czar, cheated and abused by corrupt generals and politicians.

In Petrograd we witnessed an enormous display of Reserve Troops, numbering not less than fifty thousand, in the Uritzky Platz, which is the new name given to the great square opposite the Winter Palace. Accompanying these troops were machine guns and much of the regular paraphernalia of war. The uniforms were smart and the men were well shod. Two similar displays in Moscow took place, the one chiefly of young officers in training, the other of fully trained officers about to leave for the Polish front. The oath which these men took in public, and in the presence of the British Delegation, is translated as follows :

" 1. I, son of the working people, citizen of the

Soviet Republic, take upon myself the name of a warrior of the Labour and Peasant Army.

" 2. Before the working classes of Russia and of the whole world I undertake to carry this name with honour, to follow the military calling with conscience and to preserve from damage and robbery the national and military possessions as the hair of my head.

" 3. I pledge myself to submit strictly to revolutionary discipline and to fulfil without objection every command issued by authority of the Labour and Peasant Government.

" 4. I undertake to abstain from and to deter any act liable to dishonour the name of citizen of the Soviet Republic ; moreover, to direct all my deeds and thoughts to the great aim of liberation of all workers.

" 5. I pledge myself to the defence of the Soviet Republic in any danger or assault on the part of any of her enemies at the first call of the Labour and Peasant Government, and undertake not to spare myself in the struggle for the Russian Soviet Republic, for the aims of Socialism and the Brotherhood of Nations to the extent of my full strength and of my life.

" 6. Should this promise be broken, let my fate be the scorn of my fellows. Let my punishment be the stern hand of revolutionary law."

If one may judge by appearances, by the expression of their faces, by the brisk march and the smart response to the word of command, by their bright smiles and thundering cheers, the Red Army at least is well content to serve the present Government. And it is not by any means solely because life, except for those in the front lines of battle, is more assured than for the rest of the population. True it is that the army receives first attention. It is well-clothed, it receives one hundred per cent of the food it needs ; the small supply of medicines goes to the troops ; but this is the simplest wisdom. The *moral* of the Red Army is drawn from its patriotism, and whatever Government were in power, provided it showed itself true to the people and able for defence, it would make no difference to the soldiers if the enemy were thundering at the gate.

Besides the ordinary Reserve Troops, we witnessed a great parade of the Armed Workers' Militia. Every industrial worker between the ages of eighteen and forty has to undergo compulsory military training of two-hour drills twice a week. In the parade we saw were included metal workers, building trade workers, railway workers, transport workers and distributors of food ; women workers, university graduates, technicians, and a variety of others. It took four solid hours for them to pass a given point at a quick

march. There were at least forty thousand workpeople, of whom twelve thousand were active members of the Communist party. In addition, there were hundreds of Boy Scouts, hundreds of Girl Guides, hundreds of women. The women generally marched in separate detachments, and carried no arms ; but in many cases they were actually marching with the men and dressed in uniform. We were informed they were there at their own special request that they might be trained as soldiers. There were one or two companies of nurses in uniform. On being asked as they passed the stand where the British Delegation stood if they were prepared, they shouted back gleefully : " We are prepared."

And finally, semi-military and gymnastic training is given to the school children. This all shows a great nation of one hundred and twenty-five millions of people going through a process of rapid militarisation which may one day breed menace to the rest of Europe unless understanding can be reached and maintained. At Kazan, eighty thousand splendidly trained troops were got ready for our inspection ; and all along the line it was the same.

The unwisdom of encouraging this to go farther by constant attacks from outside is dawning upon the mind of the world at last ; but to revert once more to the fear felt by some of the Delegation

and expressed in these pages more than once, the question is this : Has it or has it not gone too far already ? Has the evident pride in their new Red Army already bitten deep into their souls, so that every fresh victory adds a glory to it ? A boy with a knife wants to whittle something. Is it certain that even peace-loving Russians may not be willing to allow their brave men to advance from one conquest to another in the hope, either of making their country feared and respected by the other Powers, or in the still larger hope of accomplishing by this means the world-revolution of which their leaders dream ?

The education of the army at the front is a wonderful thing. The political staff there includes amongst its personnel of eight hundred, artists, writers, printers and teachers. University courses are provided which include instruction in all branches of civil reconstruction. It is contemplated employing many of these soldiers in the Labour Army when the military war is over, and until the economic foundations of the country are re-established. At Smolensk there is a school of drama, always an important part of Russian educational schemes.

Twelve thousand Communists, specially chosen, the very pick of the party, have been drawn from responsible administrative posts and sent to the front to receive special instruction in Red Cross

work. This drastic disturbance of so many people's lives, and of the valuable constructive work of the State, is explained and justified on the ground that the work at the front may be long, perhaps twelve months, as they have to "get through to Germany." It has been obvious for a long time to all but the unimaginative men who hold the destinies of Europe in their hands that this threat about getting through to Germany is not a light and foolish boast, but part of the extremists' plan. Should the moral temperature in Germany be pressed much below zero, the German junkers might reasonably hope to find a way out by imitating the Russian Czarist officers and throwing in their lot with the half-million Communists of Germany who would join themselves to the victorious armies of Trotsky.

For the fact is that almost all the higher commands are held in Russia by officers of the old régime. General Baltiski, commanding the Volga area, spoke quite frankly of the open and unequivocal acceptance by these old soldiers of the new Government, so disgusted were they with the old. We were informed that these men and the new working-class officers were working well together, and that the discipline of the army was daily improving.

It is suggested in some quarters that the old officers are acting with Machiavellian cunning,

and joining the Red Army in order to undo it at some favourable opportunity. I must confess that in long talks with generals and admirals I was not able to detect the slightest evidence that this was even remotely true. But if it were, their chances of this are small indeed. To every regiment is attached a regimental political Commissar. Of the Revolutionary War Council two members represent the Army along with the Commander-in-Chief, and to act with him there are two political members of the Council. Put quite simply, the chief business of the two political members of the Revolutionary Council is to watch the Chief Commander ; the chief business of each political agent is to note the behaviour of the commander of his regiment. These political agents have to watch military operations, but are not supposed to interfere with purely military business even in the event of an alteration of plans. If a serious matter, or what he regards as serious, or mysterious, arises in connection with the conduct of the Commanding Officer, the political agent is supposed to report the matter only. But if it is obviously *very* serious, he frequently takes the responsibility of acting, even to the point of suspending the commander, or of having him shot in a clear case of treachery to the Republic. The danger of this power lies in the fact that the political agent is usually a keen Com-

munist but often an ignorant man, and in that other indisputable fact: that every utterance which implies criticism of the Government, its principles or its policy, is regarded as counter-revolutionary by the Government's agents.

Discipline in the Red Army is of the most severe kind, stricter than in the old army, stricter than in most armies, particularly strict for Communist soldiers. For neglecting their duties or muddling orders men are frequently shot. To the Commander-in-Chief, Trotsky, life is very cheap, they say. I wonder if that is the reason why so many people, including many Communists, spoke of the one-time pacifist as "that beast Trotsky"?

CHAPTER VIII

Education and Religion

THE Communists have placed at the head of their Education Commissariat a man of remarkable character and great ability. Before we went to Russia reports concerning Lunacharsky had encouraged us to the belief that in him we should meet a genuine benefactor of his country. As a matter of fact I did not meet him at all, as he was not in Moscow at the time of our visit, but travelling in the south on business connected with his department.

Friends of his in Moscow discussed him with us and spoke of the incessant, obvious turmoil of a mind wrestling with two ideals, the one leading him back to the imaginative, romantic, anarchist system of a world of the past, with its leisured class and intellectual aristocracy ; the other compelling him to the necessity of bringing organisation and discipline to bear in order to carry out a programme of general communisation in education and educational ideal. That he does not allow himself to be completely subdued by the

dominating Communist passion for disciplined classification and routine, is shown in the fact that he is said to be an advocate in education of what might be described as " Luciferism "—his own word ; by which he means the habit of challenging authority, wherever it shows itself.

Moreover, the Communist Government has thought fit to encourage the artistic proclivities of the Russian people, and Art is by nature explosive and rebellious.

In Russia the theatre, the concert, dancing, drawing and the rest of it come under the control of the Minister of Education, as one department of his branch of work. Almost every school or children's colony of any size has its theatre. Self-expression through the body is in every way encouraged.

In Petrograd, education is in charge of a lady whose name is Lilina. She is the wife of Zinoviev, the founder, with Balabanov, of what is known as the Third International, and, I believe, its present secretary. She is a brisk little woman, of medium height, with a rather hard face but capable manner. She spoke French with great fluency, but no English. We spent an interesting half-hour in her room in the great Education Office before proceeding to inspect some of the schools.

It was stated that in Russia education is free and compulsory for all children up to the age of

seventeen, and that food, clothing and school materials are supplied gratis. University education is open to all, and maintenance allowances are granted to workmen and others who may wish to take the University course but whose means are limited. They must show capacity and be prepared to serve the State—two perfectly reasonable conditions.

But a single drive through the city taught us that these regulations are not universally complied with. On one occasion, I believe it was during the drive to the Putiloff Works on the extreme edge of the city, I observed considerable numbers of young children between the ages of five and fifteen playing in the streets or in the doorways of houses. I asked Madame Balabanov, who was with us, if she could explain this.

" I thought education in Russia was compulsory, and yet I see innumerable children everywhere during school hours. Can you explain it ? " was my query.

" Oh, yes," was the quick reply, " on account of your blockade we are without the necessary materials. We are short of desks, of pens and pencils, of books, even of school buildings. Until trade is resumed with other countries we cannot accommodate all our children with the things they need."

" Do the parents appear to be anxious to have

their children educated?" I asked, specially interested in everything that concerned education. "Have you any difficulty with them?"

"Yes, we have. Many of them do not yet understand the value of education nor the wisdom of compulsion in the matter. We are slowly educating the parents to keep the law. When there are enough schools for the children we shall bring great pressure to bear on the parents."

The schools we visited in Petrograd were three, and included one said to be the best in the city. Considering the limited resources of the authorities it was certainly very good. There was a fine school-house, fairly well equipped, in which the children took their meals. We sat down to a typical lunch. We had a large plate of vegetable soup, followed by a herring and brown bread, with a rather dry and hard piece of cake and thin coffee to follow. The children are not given coffee, but the rest of the food we were assured was their customary diet. It was much better than most meals eaten by the people of Petrograd.

The children slept in a separate building, the boys in one part and the girls in another. The little beds had a very attractive look, ranged in their white rows; but a close look here and there revealed a pathetic improvisation, with such inadequate materials as they had, to meet the needs of the little pupils.

The children themselves were with their teachers in the large garden, and very happy and brown they looked. They were utterly fearless of us, and wound their arms round our waists and kissed us on the cheek with the freedom and confidence of people who have learnt to expect nothing but kindness from their fellow-mortals.

It was in this school I saw M. Kerensky's small son, and it was a great pleasure to be able to report to his father that the little fellow looked well and happy.

The second school was not nearly so good. Here the children had a very ill and underfed appearance. But nothing was seen to indicate that the very best possible was not being done for them. This also was a school in the country environs of Petrograd. The third place was for the special treatment of defective children. A clinic was shown us with a certain just pride, where skilled scientists devote themselves to the study and treatment of the imbecile, making an attempt to follow the splendid lead of certain of the United States physicians in their treatment of the morally defective as sick and not wicked people.

A very charming feature of the Russian educational system is the establishment in all parts of the country of boarding-schools for proletarian children, which they describe as "school

colonies." The expropriated houses of wealthy persons are being used for this purpose. The house-buildings have been altered and furnished appropriately, and the large grounds and park-lands frequently attached serve for the fresh-air culture of the children, or are turned into farm lands for the provision of milk and other suitable produce. Although the regulations on account of the scarcity forbid milk to children in towns who have passed the infant years, the rule is most happily broken in the country where it is possible to break it; but sometimes even in the country milk is very, very scarce, and I visited one children's colony in Samara where the despairing teachers confessed that the children got practically no milk at all.

At some of these children's colonies we had most entertaining times with the children. One little fellow, the musical genius of the place, gave us one of his original compositions on the piano. I have already written of the little chap who rattled off his father's or his teacher's pet Communist speech, probably without understanding a word of it. But at one place, a particularly bright boy of twelve or thirteen put us to shame by demanding to know why the English workers were fighting the Russian workers, and why we were trying to starve Russian children with our blockade. This same lad ringingly demanded that we

should "go home and tell the British workmen to turn their rich people into the streets."

And here is my sole, real quarrel with the sincere and devoted educationists of Russia. The great outstanding purpose of their ordinary education is to teach Communism. They declare this in their manifestos. The education system has its truly beautiful artistic side, and so long as that is not stultified the soul of Russia is safe; but, for the most part, the Russian system is utilitarian, with, I repeat, Communism as its ultimate purpose, the making of Communists its goal. I could quote extensively from Communist sources to prove this, as to prove other matters; and there are those Socialists who would justify it. But I have been interested in education all my life, and I feel very strongly that it is a wrong to a child to bend its mind towards any special theories, Communist or other. To teach a child to read and write; to think and observe; to sift and weigh evidence; to create in it a love of beauty and a passion for truth; to develop in it gracious manners and a consideration for others—this it seems to me is the whole of the law and the prophets so far as educational ideal is concerned.

It may be taken as a general rule, however, that in Bolshevist Russia the children are given very serious consideration. After the needs of the army have been served come those of the

children. The army very naturally gets 100 per cent of its needs in food satisfied. Then come the children, who are better fed than the adults, which means in fact that a very large part of the adult population of the towns gets not more than 25 per cent of its needs in food unless it can supplement the ordinary Government rations. A modification of this appalling state of things lies in the fact that part of a man's wage is paid in kind, and that in addition to his roubles he gets food. Otherwise, the extravagant nonsense of prejudiced newsmongers might come true, and corpses be found lying about the streets of Moscow and Petrograd.

A noteworthy and admirable feature of the educational system is the school for Adult Education. These schools are springing up everywhere. It is realised that the greater part of the Russian people are illiterate, and the defect is sought to be remedied by giving the older folk opportunities of attending all sorts of evening classes. We visited one of these adult evening schools, and saw grown men and women with young people and children join together in singing, dancing and dramatic performances; saw their sewing and their painting, their sculpture and their design; and without being a Communist one could heartily congratulate those who were responsible for bringing so much light and happiness into the

lives of men and women for whom these good things had been unattainable in the past.

The perfect pleasure of this occasion was once more marred by one of those incidents, become painfully numerous by this time. I was asked by a young Communist if I would take a letter to his relative in Berlin: "But please," he said, "I will not hand it to you openly or it would be necessary to explain and there might be trouble." How I got the letter, I shall not disclose; but I handed it to its owner in the hotel in Berlin, who rejoiced with mingled tears and smiles to learn that her loved one was alive and well.

The education of village children is at present, even in design, more modest and less complete than that of town children. It is carried on during the winter months only, as the children are required for field work in the summer; and it is given to children between the ages of eight and thirteen only. Some day it is hoped to educate everybody, but the official estimate of the number of children actually in receipt of education is about 25 per cent of the whole. This is probably a very generous estimate, as is the estimate that two million children are being housed and fed at the expense of the State in children's boarding schools and colonies. If the statement which was made to us is even approximately true, that one child in three in Russia is without either one

parent or both, it is a sad reflection on modern civilisation, and should be an added spur to the resolve to make peace as soon as possible so that no more children may be orphaned.

The State has taken religious teaching out of the schools, which, to men and women in England who have seen in the quarrels of sectarians a real barrier to progress in education, may have some merit in it. But the Communists have gone further. The use of the word God is forbidden to the teachers. Holy pictures and ikons are not supposed to be used, but actually are used, and the authorities do not think it wise to interfere. At the head of almost every little bed in the children's dormitories was a picture of Jesus or of the Holy Mother ; in the Putiloff Works large ikons stood, some covered up it is true, but others undraped. The view of the Communist leaders on this matter is well-expressed in their manifestos. They declare that " religion was one of the means by which the bourgeoisie maintained their tyranny over the working masses ; that the Russian Communist party must be guided by the conviction that only the realisation of class-conscious and systematic social and economic activity of the masses will lead to the disappearance of religious prejudices." They declare that " the aim of the party is finally to destroy the ties between the exploiting classes and organisations

for religious propaganda, at the same time helping the working class actually to liberate its mind from religious superstitions, and organising on a wide scale secular and anti-theological propaganda. It is, however, necessary to avoid offending religious susceptibilities of believers which leads only to the strengthening of religious fanaticism."

The last phrase explains, doubtless, why there is no interference with attendence at church ; and it is certainly to be noted that the churches are crowded to the doors and, apparently, most of the time. Some hope and believe that the separation of State and Church and the obligation placed upon believers to maintain their own churches out of their own pockets will have this good effect at least : that the quality of religious preaching will improve and the standard of the ministry be raised. If the poor duped populace can be successfully delivered from the brigandage and trickery of unscrupulous and avaricious priests, of whom there has been a great host in the past, it will be a benefit not only to the suffering people but to the cause of true religion itself. And what I describe as " true religion," the living spirit of goodness in the hearts and minds of men, is growing in the very land where God is regarded as counter-revolutionary and banished, officially, as a traitor to mankind. Not by the decrees of Lenin nor of

any other person will that which is rooted in the nature and needs of men be cast out—the need of worship and the aspiration after the ideal.

The Communists realise that "Logicians may reason about abstractions but the great mass of men must have images," to this extent, at least, that they have placed in every school and public building portraits and busts of Karl Marx and Lenin. The only time some of us saw Lenin he was sitting for the sculptor, who was busy preparing his new graven image! And whether they realise it or not, it remains the fact that the Communists have not destroyed religion. They have simply changed the creed. And for the Inquisition, with its thumb-screws and its flaming faggots, the Extraordinary Commission supplies an adequate substitute!

CHAPTER IX

Off to Moscow

OFF to Moscow at last, the city of our dreams ! I have not told one half of our adventures in Petrograd. It is not possible to do so. The tour of the great Putiloff Works was of enormous interest, and may be referred to in a later part of the narrative. Our visit to the gloomy fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul at midnight had a mournful fascination for those who have steeped themselves in the lore of the martyrs of the Revolution. The old keeper of the cells is still there, impassive and unresponsive as a man of such responsibilities might well be, as quietly content to serve the new order as the old, human enough to be pleased that no one occupied his quarters at the time of our visit. We saw the large, damp, gloomy cells, twice as big as the cells of an English prison, whose sole claim to comfort lay in the provision in each cell of running water and a sanitary convenience. These things were not, of course, in the punishment cells, which were entirely dark and partly under water. The high-

walled, narrow gully, where prisoners were taken to be shot, from which no sound could penetrate to the outer world, sent thrills of cold horror down our backs. The ingenious methods of torture made us physically sick. Altogether it was a gruesome experience, unrelieved of its sad associations by the humorous writings on the wall of British prisoners temporarily incarcerated on suspicion of promoting counter-revolutionary activity.

Off to Moscow! The city of golden domes and spires! So different from Peter the Great's city of the marshes, new and splendid though that is, with the broad Neva to add to its beauty.

The same comfortable train took us there in thirteen hours. Usually it takes longer; but orders had come through that we must be in Moscow by noon the day following, and we were there to a minute. The crowds which met us in the railway station and lined the approaches to the station beggar description, both for their size and the warmth of their reception. Here was an open-hearted, generous lot of people, to whom we felt drawn from the very first minute. It did not take long to sense a difference between these folk and those we had just left. There was less of strain and torment here, more of human jolliness and kindliness; less of the burning fever of revolution, more of its constructive hope.

The representatives of the Soviets and the Trade Unions met us. The bands played merrily, the flags and banners waved briskly and gleamed brightly. The usual speeches of welcome were made and properly acknowledged. And then we left in the fleet of motor-cars provided for us to the large and commodious Hotel Delavoy Dvor, a whole floor of which had been devoted to our use. Special passes were handed to us at the station which admitted us to all the public buildings of the Government, and we prepared ourselves for a useful and strenuous time.

The hotel in which we were lodged was a modern business men's place taken over by the Government with the rest of Moscow's great public buildings. It stands at the entry to a large square and is within a good stone's throw of the Kremlin. Our quarters were very comfortable, almost luxurious, with substantial furnishings and good beds ; but alas for the scriptural injunction : " Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness ! " A new " Red Army " left its trail of blood along our pillows, one which, after the first night, drove us from our beds to the refuge of the more comfortable sofas. I give my word, there are more crawling things in that Moscow hotel than I had imagined were contained in the whole universe ! Not in ones, nor twos, but in

battalions, they came, making the night hideous. Soon their slain bodies began to make effective patterns upon the wall-paper ; but they had the advantage of numbers and we were compelled to yield to superior forces, and give up the attempt to annihilate them.

Moscow is indeed the real Russian city, semi-oriental in type. The number of its churches is amazing, and their vari-coloured domes and cupolas glittered beautifully in the hot, bright sun. The streets were in fairly good condition, and were much cleaner than we had been led to expect, or than the streets of some other towns which were visited. The people here looked under-nourished, as in Petrograd, but there was more spring in their gait, less misery in their mien. Sober, stolid, unemotional, indifferent, they spent little time in looking at us beyond the tops of our boots, which in their shockingly bootless condition were the things which interested them most. Sometimes they frowned at our cars when these scattered dust all over them or threatened to run them down.

The open markets of Moscow present a very interesting spectacle. Private trading has not been abolished. It has only been driven into the streets. Almost all the shops have been closed ; all the big ones. The lively appearance of the streets in most big cities is due to the brightly

dressed shop-windows, displaying tempting stores of goods of all sorts. All this side of life has vanished. There are the Soviet Stores, the Co-operative Stores and the displays of peasant arts and crafts ; but these present no attractive appearance and the goods supplied tend towards standardisation, the thing which robs shopping of half its joys. Besides these there are small shops selling those goods which are not Government monopolies, such small wares as bootlaces, pins ; certain fruits and flowers ; agricultural products such as eggs, milk, potatoes, carrots, green vegetables and pork. Bread, both black and white, is on sale, the black bread at 400 roubles and the white at 1000 roubles a pound.

I paid a visit to the Moscow markets on several occasions for the purpose of discovering market prices, and actually bought eggs at 150 roubles each, flowers (peonies) at 400 roubles each blossom, sour milk at 130 roubles a tumblerful (half a pint) and small cucumbers at 140 roubles each. In addition I discovered that the price of potatoes in the open market was 130 roubles a pound and horseflesh from 460 to 600 roubles a pound. The average wage of an unskilled labourer in Moscow is about 2000 roubles per month. The average wage of a good skilled worker is not more than 4000 roubles a month. It is true that an addition is made to the value of the wage

by the gift of one good meal, and in some special circumstances, of two meals a day. But it is also true that the Government ration is only half what the people require for health and that men and women must perforce buy in the open market or go without necessary food. According to the prices and wages ruling in Moscow at the present time, the money wage of a very well-paid skilled worker, 4000 roubles a month, would buy ten pound loaves of black bread or four pound loaves of white bread; about seven pounds of horse-flesh, twenty-seven fresh eggs or twenty-four pints of milk (at 180 roubles a pint), and so on. Naturally, he must go without these things and do his best to eke out a living on Government supplies.

There are rows of shaded booths in the market-place, with regular salesmen and women in attendance; but most of the trading is done by individuals without stalls, refined and gentle folk, bourgeois many of them, coming in the lowest categories for food, untrained in work for the most part, and keeping soul and body together by selling one by one articles of clothing or pieces of jewellery to whoever will buy. Speculators haunt the place, and buy the most valuable jewels and clothes for a mere song, re-selling to others, sometimes peasants, in exchange for food, sometimes foreign profiteers out for big fortunes

As private trading is against the law, in theory at least, the Government sends periodically its emissaries to sweep down upon the offenders, and a poor man or unhappy woman is sent to prison for a term in order to deter the rest. Real criminals are sometimes caught in this fashion, and when their premises are searched are discovered to have hoards of valuable trinkets, costly clothing and precious stones for sale at some future time and at fabulous prices to the " new bourgeoisie," or the rich peasantry, able to buy with their agricultural produce, and frantic to possess the things they had scarcely been allowed to look at before. But very often it is some poor trembling soul who is famished and cold who is pounced upon, and unused to the rough ways of the new world goes to her punishment in fear and trembling, to come out of prison a nervous wreck and shadow of her former self.

Many of these people we saw, and were filled with pity. Surreptitiously one would produce a tiny jewelled watch, a magnificent diamond ring, a costly fur, a beautifully ornamented comb, an exquisite enamel, or a piece of rare china, looking fearfully at us lest after all we were *agents provocateurs* come to tempt before destroying. I have seen nothing more pitiful in all my life than the struggle of these poor souls to live.

There appear to be no automobiles in Moscow

except those owned and worked by the Government. Materials for repairs are greatly needed to keep even these running smoothly. Many times the good cars devoted to our service broke down. Once when we were thirty versts out of Moscow at three o'clock in the morning, our car went wrong. Another came running up alongside. Our driver ran to beg assistance. Instantly he was covered with a revolver. He stood back sharply and the car drove on ; but not before we had caught a glimpse in the bright moonlight of one of the occupants. It was Trotsky. Whether he thought we were seeking his life, or whether he was in a vast hurry and did not wish to be detained by a broken-down car we shall never know. But there was more than a slight thrill in the adventure for the man who looked down the muzzle of that revolver !

The trams were running in Moscow, and they were as crowded as the London tube railway-carriages at the evening hour during the war. On every inch where a foothold could be maintained, both inside and out, people stood or clung. We were told that this happened on the railways during the winter, with awful consequences to scores of people who could not be restrained. Under the necessity of travelling, these poor souls froze to death on the tops of carriages, clinging to footboards or riding on

buffers, their dead bodies being picked up by railway workers on the line.

The droshky drivers, of whom few are left in Petrograd but many in Moscow, are a picturesque race of old fellows, with their tall, broad-brimmed hats, their thick, ample coats with leather or metal belts, their high boots and profuse whiskers. For a thousand roubles you might drive a mile or so in a very comfortable little carriage out of which it would be almost impossible to fall.

There is perfect order in the city streets. By night or by day one can walk with absolute safety. During the summer months it never really grows dark. People take long leisure hours in the parks and open spaces as in every other great city. Or they go to church. One or two open-air cafés appear to be still in existence patronised in the main by the old and new bourgeoisie, those of the former class who have not quite spent their all, and those of the latter class who are spending in this way for the first time. For one thousand roubles a plate of tolerable ice-cream can be had, or coffee and cakes. There is little of gaiety, none of the old café laughter and play. The general gloom pervades everything.

I have been in both Vienna and Berlin since the overwhelming cataclysm of the war. Berlin and Vienna are both unhappy cities, filled with people who are hungry and despairing. Moscow

was at least no worse than these cities, either in appearance or in fact; and in some respects proved to be better than either. It is crowded with people and hotel accommodation is difficult to find. Enquirers from the four corners of the globe are there. Peacemakers from the border states are there. American, Swedish and other traders are there. Admirers of Sovietism and worshippers of Lenin have come to bow the knee to the new lord of the Kremlin.

Moscow is the Government's headquarters. It is the home of the Commissars. It is the seat of one of the most amazing experiments the modern world has seen. It is a place of great interest for the whole of the watching world. It is the pivot upon which earth-shaking events will turn. And it deserves to be treated with respect, and not with the ignorant contempt which stupid people shower upon it.

Mistakes have been made there, cruel things are being done there; but the mistakes are not bigger nor the cruel things more cruel than have recently been made and done in other capital cities by men who, for character and integrity, ability and personality are not fit to tie the shoe-strings of the best of the men and women of Moscow.

CHAPTER X

An Interview with Lenin

I AM not so foolish as to think that one brief interview of an hour and a half entitles one to be dogmatic about any individual, much less about the character of Lenin. It is not possible to know anyone in so short a time. I had read much of what Lenin had written, and disagreed very profoundly with most of it; but I knew that he had kept together his Government in circumstances of tremendous difficulty and discouragement for more than two and a half years. One after another he and his tireless colleague, Trotsky, had overcome his country's enemies, both civil and alien. Koltchak, Denikin, Judenitch, Petliura and all the great host of lesser foes I had seen go down before the more terrible hosts of Lenin, and had marvelled, as had the whole world with me. What sort of man was this Lenin, it was questioned? Was he man or devil? Whence came his power over the people? What helped and enabled him to keep all the main forces of his country together and to sweep, one by one, his enemies out of his path?

We visited him in his room in the Kremlin. Every approach to this room was guarded by a sentry. We were required to show our passes several times before we reached the inner sanctum. He received us quietly but graciously. An artist was engaged upon a bust of him whilst we talked.

He is a small man with a bald head, having a fringe of reddish hair at the back and a tiny red beard. His mouth is large and his lips thick; his eyes are red-brown, and possess the merriest twinkle. Do not, gentle visitor, when you meet the great man fall victim to this twinkling eye, and make the mistake of thinking it betokens a tender spirit. I am sure Lenin is the kindest and gentlest of men in private relationships; but when he mentioned his solution of the peasant problem, the merry twinkle had a cruel glint which horrified. "Do you not have a great deal of trouble with the peasants?" he was asked. "Do they not, as in the rest of Europe, object very strongly to the communisation of land?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply, "we have trouble occasionally; but it is with the rich peasants chiefly. But we soon get over that. We send to the village a good Communist, who explains to the poor peasant the position and shows to him how the rich peasant is his enemy, and the poor peasant does the rest. Ha! ha! ha!"

Lenin's method with his visitors is clever. He

has a most engaging frankness. He suggests by his manner a more or less confidential exchange of opinions. But when the interview is over, it is found that he has told you far less than you have told him.

He impressed me with his fanaticism. This is surely the source of his driving power. And yet I am told that compared with the really fanatical Communist Lenin is mildness itself and should be classed with the " Right." It was rumoured that he is engaged on a new book to be given the name " The Infant Diseases of Communism," or some such title, which suggests an honest confession of mistakes made in the early days of the Commune. If this be true there is hope of happiness for Russia yet. But I must confess, his firm belief in the necessity of violence for the establishment throughout the world of his ideals makes one doubt miserably.

He showed a surprising lack of knowledge of the British Labour Movement. He gave to conscious and intelligent Communism a far larger place in British politics than can truly be accorded to it, seeing there is as yet no organised Communist party, but only a handful of extremists of the older Socialist movements.

When asked why he considered a certain individual to be of importance in the political world of Great Britain he gave as his reason that the

British Government had arrested her! He did not seem to be aware of the fact that the policy of the British Government during the war was, as a rule, to arrest the little people who were without following and let the bigger folk go free. Scores of examples of this could have been supplied to him had it been of importance, which was not the case.

Lenin believes that a very tiny Communist group, working upon a mass of inflammable human beings, suffering from unemployment and hunger, can make the revolution necessary to establish a new order of society. He urges all Communists in Great Britain to get together in one party and work to this end. He appears to think that the British revolution is imminent. He has no use for the pacifist philosophy of life and believes that only the working classes should be armed and the rest disarmed. He looks for a world-revolution in which the toiling masses shall own and control everything. I do not know from personal speech his opinion on the Polish business; but I was credibly informed that he is more or less indifferent to peace and cares little about the raising of the blockade and the resumption of trade with Great Britain. His view is simple. Everything that promotes conditions favourable for a world-revolution is to be approved. The rest matters little.

At the same time, I believe him to be altogether too sane to be ready to throw away when it offers opportunities of really beginning to develop the Communist State.

Lenin, like all the Communists, conveys the impression of awful sureness of himself, of an immovable and overpowering self-confidence. It is not the smiling self-complacency, the shallow cocksureness of that very common individual amongst us who is sure that wisdom will die with him. It is the deadly certainty that he is right and everybody who differs from him is wrong, of the scholar and fanatic who would sacrifice his own head as readily as he would sacrifice yours in the believed interests of the thing he loves. The war has proved the danger of entrusting the world's training and the affairs of State to professors. And Lenin is above all things the keen-brained, dogmatic professor in politics.

Radek is a different kind of personality. His speech and his movements are quick. In appearance he is a thin, ascetic-looking man, with side-whiskers and curly hair, and looks not unlike a picture of an early Victorian squire. He has long, thin, nervous hands, very eloquent in gesture. Conversation with him is a monologue, in which he runs on endlessly from one subject to another, and from one point to another, anticipating your

questions. He deals much in irony, but his large, pleasant eyes covered with horned spectacles gleam not unkindly whilst he scorches you with his words. He shows an infinite knowledge of the Socialist movements of the world, connecting personalities therein with events in a most marvellous fashion. Like most fanatics he is intolerant of the opinions of others and uses strong and even abusive language in dealing with those from whom he differs. He is a shrewd judge of men and events; but I am convinced that his is the fanaticism which would run the ship of State upon the rocks if not controlled by more temperate men.

His great interest is the Third International, an organisation of Communists who have adopted the dictatorship of the proletariat, government on the Soviet plan, and revolution by violence as the three main points in their platform. This International is the rival to the Second International held at Berne in 1919, three months after the armistice. Their principal quarrel with the Second International is the inclusion in it of those Socialists who supported the war and joined bourgeois governments. These men, they say, deny Socialism, if not in words, by the implication of their actions, and they can have nothing to do with such. The Second International also maintains an old-fashioned belief

in political democracy which they declare has been tested and found wanting.

Communists in Moscow themselves told me that there is little to be hoped from the Third International as at present constituted; that it was formed irregularly by a few forceful and domineering men, who thrust a programme upon it, which they made it accept; that the representatives of foreign countries who were present at the initial gathering were not accredited, but were the returned exiles who happened to be on the spot; and that the insistence of a rigid discipline within the organisation, whilst it might exclude weak and wavering societies who would be a weakness and not a strength, would so restrict its numbers and eventually weary its members that it could not become effective as it is. These men were themselves in favour of the world social revolution, so that their criticism is important.

The document sent to this country by the Executive Committee of the Third International in reply to questions addressed to it by some of the British visitors will definitely exclude all but the bitterest and extremest of British Socialists, who for their intellectual sport play with vast explosive human forces very much as a little child plays with fire. Since this document is immediately to be published in a separate volume,

and so made available for all who care to read it, it is unnecessary to quote it at length. Sufficient to say, it follows the lines already indicated as the plan of action proposed for the proletarians of the whole world by the Third International sitting in its Second Conference in Moscow as I write these words.

Dr. Semasco, the People's Commissar of Public Health is one of the most admirable and devoted men it has been my lot to meet. Against the most appalling sanitary conditions left by war, poverty, pestilence and famine, this heroic doctor is putting up a magnificent fight. He and his band of gallant helpers have few means with which to work. They are almost entirely lacking soap and disinfectants, as the needs of the army must be first supplied and production in these things is almost at a standstill ; but in spite of this, he is doing marvellous things and rapidly stamping out some of the epidemic diseases which have raged all over the country. As every town and village in Russia has been, in a more or less degree, affected by one or another of the plagues of typhus, small-pox, dysentery, cholera and recurrent fever, the first line of attack on these things has been through the strict control of the means of communication. Every train carries its medical staff, and includes in its make-up a carriage to which discovered cases of actual or

incipient disease can be at once removed and attended to. Control stations have been placed at fixed points on the lines, and here people have to undergo compulsory examination, bathing and disinfecting as far as means will permit.

Besides these measures, a house-cleaning campaign, for which women have been largely employed, is undertaken at frequent intervals, when people are made thoroughly to clean the insides and outsides of their dwellings and their furniture. Stern treatment follows neglect of this order and the result shows great improvement.

The figures for typhus cases for all Russia for some of the months of the present year reveal the excellent progress being made.

February	369,859	(civilians)
March	313,624	„
April	158,308	„
January	66,113	(army)
February	75,978	„
March	57,251	„
April	16,505	„

Dr. Semasco is a short, spare man, dark in appearance, energetic in action. He is a stern foe of all alcoholic drinks and is, besides, an opponent of the smoking habit, both on purely

health grounds. He neither drinks nor smokes himself. He is one of the very few doctors who are Communists, and has served a term in prison under the old régime for some inoffensive piece of Socialist activity. It is impossible properly to judge Russia, after all, without taking into account its revolutionary history and its inheritance from the past. The slightest thing was regarded as an offence against the Government by the stupid Autocracy which has gone, and punished with abominable severity; such things, for instance, as the teaching of the peasants to read and write. If there is much to be condemned in the present suppression of freedom, in common fairness it must be remembered where the present rulers learnt their lessons in tyranny.

One of the very ablest of the People's Commissars is the Acting-Commissar for Ways and Communications, Sverdloff. We travelled in his company from Nijni-Novgorod to Astrakhan. He it was who kindly put at our disposal the train *de luxe* which carried our sick friend from Saratov to Reval, and whose considerate kindness on the ship enabled us to save his life.

He is in appearance slight and pale, of Jewish birth, with dark expressive eyes and rather autocratic manner. He has been many times in prison for his political faith, although his revolutionary record appears to have been less lurid

than that of his brother who recently died of the pestilence. He was in exile in America and England for some years, and studied with acute intelligence American business methods, particularly American business discipline. He has brought this knowledge and training to bear upon Russia's greatest internal problem—the restoration of her lines of communication. He realises that these can be fully and quickly restored only by the hardest work and severest discipline. His colleagues and subordinates he works eighteen hours a day. When they are disobedient or neglectful in the slightest degree the punishment is severe. But the work is done, and the men adore him. An officer of high rank who was five minutes late to the ship was given twenty-four hours in prison, to be worked off in his leisure and not in his labour time. Rebellious workmen, loading a ship with fish in the hot sun at Astrakhan, who struck for a rest were driven back to their work by Communist sailors with loaded rifles. These two things I know to be true, for I saw them.

But the importance of his work cannot be exaggerated, and Sverdloff's impatience with Soviet interference in industry can be well understood. People dying for lack of food and medicines cannot wait for the debates of Committees to decide this or that point in the organisation of

train or steamship communication. Managerial responsibility is the only way.

Through Sverdloff's able organisation the whole of the railways and bridges destroyed by the Koltchak bands have been restored. Communication with Siberia has been re-established. Fleets of oil-ships are bringing from Baku millions of poods of oil, so necessary for railway engines and workshop machinery. And when the economic life of Russia is fully restored, no small part of the credit must be given to this extraordinarily able and commanding personality.

There are others of the Communists who might with interest be described, men like Serada, the Commissar for Agriculture, of blameless life and lofty idealism ; Tchicherine, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, gentle by nature, artistic by temperament, uncomfortable in the whirlpool of politics as it seemed to me, and shrinking, sad-eyed, into nothing with the burden of the office unto which he was not born, turned tyrant through suffering, the instrument of less admirable men than himself. Of the able Communist women Madame Colontai was reported in Kharkoff. Madame Lenin was too seriously ill to be seen. Madame Trotsky never came to see us, though she was said to be in the Opera House when her husband made his sudden and dramatic appearance. Madame Kameneff, who has charge

of one department of educational work, is a charming little lady who gives the impression of great ability joined to an amiable manner. Of the humbler men and women Communists talked with I shall have something to say in later chapters.

CHAPTER XI

Talks with Communists and Others

THE peasants form more than three-quarters of the population of Russia, and one of the greatest friends of the peasants, who was also an intimate of Tolstoy's, kindly invited three of us to his home, and came to the hotel to fetch us. His name is Tcherkoff, and for some years he lived in England as head of a tiny Co-operative Colony near Bournemouth. He is extremely interested in Co-operation which, in his view, is the right line of social development, particularly for a country like Russia. It is said there were eighty-eight million members of the Russian Co-operative Societies before the war.

An amusing little episode occurred as we prepared to leave the hotel. A second car was filling with other Delegates, bound to a great propaganda meeting under the auspices of Madame Balabanov. As this car left ours behind, Madame Balabanov waved her hand and shouted for all to hear, pointing at Tcherkoff :

" We are going to life. They are going to

death," which I take it was her pleasant way of characterising the anti-government, pacifist philosophy of our friend and host.

Tcherkoff lives with his wife and family in a house on the outskirts of Moscow. Madame Tcherkoff is a great invalid, and apologised for not being able to rise from her chair to receive us. She is a gentle little lady, of very frail and delicate appearance. Her husband is magnificently tall, grey-haired and pale, with beautiful hands. They both looked under-nourished. Being non-workers in the Communist sense they probably come in the lowest category for food. I was told that they must have died of sheer hunger but for the packets of biscuit and other food surreptitiously sent to them by unknown peasant friends. They gave us of their scanty supply of tea, and we had a most delightful talk.

There were, perhaps, ten persons present, all conscientious objectors to war in any and every circumstance. A newspaper rumour that one pacifist member of our Delegation had denied his principles had sincerely disturbed these good men, who, by the way, included Paul Birukoff, the biographer of Tolstoy. It was sought to reassure them on this point, and then we proceeded to ask questions for our own information.

According to their replies we learnt that though the present Government is bad, as from their

point of view all governments must be, especially highly centralised ones, this Government was better than the preceding one, and they would do nothing to add to its difficulties till better times came.

At the same time they deplored the restrictions upon liberty, which they declared were more and worse than under the Czars. They spoke with quiet dignity of the killing of conscientious objectors, of whom fifteen, personally known to members of this group, and certified by Tcherkoff's Committee as genuine objectors, had been shot, some of them in their cells. Nobody who has come into personal contact with Tcherkoff would believe for one moment that such a man could lie.

We talked much and long about peace and non-resistance, and our half-frozen minds melted again under the kindly, human tones of the voices of gentle dreamers who to the world would seem mad, but whose way, the way of personal gentleness and kindly toleration, the world will have to take ultimately if it is to be saved. They sent us away with cheers and words of blessing; and I, at least, and I think the others also, felt that we had indeed been blessed.

The Theosophical Society in Petrograd has had its headquarters closed as being a counter-revolutionary organisation; but in Moscow it

still meets on occasion for the mutual comfort and help of its members. Some of its people have brought themselves within the law and have paid the penalty. For giving aid to the Government's enemies by sheltering an agent of Koltchak, who was also a personal friend, two members of the society, one an old woman, have been shot. Technically in the wrong, one wonders how much of it was ignorance on the part of these unhappy people, and if the country's interests would not have been better served if a warning had been given (with a term of imprisonment if thought fit) instead of the drastic action that actually was taken.

Amongst those who are not of the Government but are doing nothing to hinder or hamper it we met Emma Goldman, the famous American anarchist deportee. For the life of me I was unable to discover why so mild a little woman should have been sent out of America. Her opinions, compared with those of the average Communist in Russia, appeared to be as water is to strong wine. She reminded me of nobody so much as a typical member of the Women's Co-operative Guild or of a Woman's Social Service Club in the United States. She is certainly not happy where she is, and ought to be allowed to return if she wishes. She complained that very many anarchists, known to her, had been shot in Petrograd for counter-

revolutionary activity. She was very bitter about this. It will come as a shock of surprise to many people to learn that violent anarchism is not tolerated by the Bolsheviki; not at any rate when directed against themselves. Anarchism is the negation of the Bolshevik aim and ideal. I do not know what Emma Goldman's exact record is. I only know that to me she seemed a kind, motherly little woman who would as soon think of cutting off her own nose as throwing a bomb at anybody else.

Of the humbler folk of the city and of the second rank of Communist leaders I saw much and learnt greatly from them. It is idle to say that there are no class divisions in Communist Russia. The differences may not be so wide, but they are clearly marked. Even the generous use of the word comrade (*tovarisch*) cannot cover up the fact that class distinctions exist. The comrades who waited upon us at table and who looked after our rooms and drove us about in cars were called *tovarisch*, but I did not observe that the courtesy due to equals was shown to them. I have never seen servants anywhere treated with less consideration. They began their work early in the morning, at seven or eight, and they were frequently working at one and two o'clock the next morning. People never came at the time they promised to their meals, and put them to any

amount of inconvenience. Drivers were left sitting on their cars for interminable hours. I never saw any of them thanked by any Russian in the place. The typists who were sent to serve us were ordered to eat in a little back kitchen until one of the Delegates intervened. The waiters on train and ship appeared to be incessantly on duty. It may of course be the Russian way, and I am bound to say I heard no complaints. But then one does not question the members of the household of one's host about their working conditions. I simply say that the way in which those who did the hard, unpleasant work were treated would have sent British domestics on strike in battalions and left the bourgeois citizens of England servantless.

Two private talks with members of the intelligent rank and file of Socialism in Russia gave me much light on the situation. One was an elderly man of very keen understanding who still refused to believe that human beings would not answer to the reasoned appeal, responding only to the whiplash of politics. He had been a lifelong revolutionary and had served many years in Siberia. He was frankly disappointed in the present Government and deplored many of its tendencies. This no doubt explained the fact that no position of power is held by this man, for on grounds of sheer ability and training as well as of revolu-

tionary ideal he could have been of enormous service. He is a member of the Communist party, but believes in the obligation of trying to keep it pure and wholesome through criticism.

"Why are you disappointed with Soviet Russia?" I enquired, eager to be instructed on the point.

"Chiefly because it is not carrying out Socialism," was his reply. "In theory the land is nationalised, in practice we have a system of peasant proprietorship. In theory classes have been abolished, in practice there is a new bourgeoisie and a new proletariat springing up. In theory it is a 'Peasants and Workers Government,' in practice there is no political equality and no democracy; for the peasants, the biggest part of the population, have only one vote where the townspeople have five. The peasants are making themselves rich by the sale of their produce for goods. These they will store until such a time as they can sell for big prices. They will be the new capitalists."

"But is not all this inevitable, considering the war and the continued existence of Capitalism in other countries," I queried?

"Perhaps. But they must not call it Communism, nor even Socialism. My quarrel with them is that they misname the thing. It is an autocracy, with a fresh group of autocrats. It is a

bureaucracy very much like the old one for greed, incompetence and corruption. And if the personnel were reduced by fifty per cent, the work would be done just as well."

I could see he was almost bitter in his disappointment.

"But education will remedy that in time," I said hopefully.

"I doubt it. The nation is being rapidly militarised. The whole thing will harden into a system. The ground is being prepared for a new Czar or a Napoleon. I am full of grave fear for the future." So the old man talked.

"Let us hope you are wrong," I said, and left him to talk to a bright girl who had called for a good pair of boots I was able to spare.

But I must frankly say that this note was very frequently struck. By some it was regarded as the way of deliverance; by others, like my old friend, as the death-knell of all their hopes.

"They ought never to have attempted the experiment," said another distinguished servant of the Republic, speaking of the Bolsheviki, "if they had no more promise of success than this. It was a crime against the nation, for the Allies would not have made war against a National Assembly chosen by the whole people, and the people of Russia would now have been a long way on the road to reconstruction and happiness."

My girl friend was a Manchester lass who was working in a Soviet office. I asked her if she was happy, and she looked wistful and said she was hungry a good deal and that she could " do very well with some stockings and underclothes," but that she liked her work, which was translating, and had no complaints on that score.

" But," I said, " why don't you go home? Are you being kept here against your will? "

" Oh no," she replied very quickly, " I could go home if I wanted to, but—" and here a deep, red blush spread over her pretty face and told me her story without further words. She will not leave until her lover can come too. As a productive worker he cannot be spared at present. So the two stay and work and love and hope together.

I find these complications not uncommon. There is an English colony in Petrograd, suffering greatly from lack of means, and anxious to have the British Government send out a Commissioner to help them in various ways. They have full leave from the Russian Government to repatriate their members. But domestic tangles lie in the way. A mother has two daughters, one British and the other (perhaps by marriage) Russian. She cannot bear to go away and leave one child behind, and the Russian child is not at present acceptable to the British Government. Or a lover is involved as in the case of Miss W——.

Or a dead husband has left his wife bound in the chain of his Russian nationality. One Government or the other refuses to give the necessary papers.

What the sufferings of the citizens of Petrograd and Moscow must have been in the early days of the Revolution, and during the whole of the period of the first Revolution, chiefly from the general disorganisation and the advantage taken of it by disorderly bands of soldiers and ordinary thieves and criminals it is impossible properly to imagine.

One young Communist told me something of the experiences of himself and his wife. He told the story quietly, in the passive Russian fashion, as if it were the kind of tale one tells at the nursery fire to a sleepy child. This fatalism is the most amazing quality of the Russian character.

" We had our little house in Petrograd, my wife and I. We expected our first baby very soon. We were very happy in each other, but cold and hungry all the time. That didn't matter. We were happy." Here he stopped and gave a despairing look.

" I blame myself bitterly," he said. " My wife is an English girl. We were married in England the year before the War. I brought her to Russia. Russia was England's ally then. How could I foresee the war that very few wiser people foresaw? How could I know that revolution would come

when it did, and that it would make so many differences?" There was a long pause. "Poor girl, she was not used to such sufferings. And I brought them on her." He showed me a photograph. "Look," he said, "and please take this. I have put the address of her brother and sister in England on the back. I have sent her and the little baby to Helsingfors. She is very ill. Her spine is packed in plaster of Paris. I sold everything that was left and gave her fourteen pounds, all I could raise. I sent her to England to her family. I hope she will arrive safely."

I looked incredulous at the courage and, I must confess, what looked like the folly of it. "Has she a British passport?" I asked. "She is now a Russian, you know, since her marriage with you, and she may have difficulties in getting into England. They are frightened of Bolsheviks in England." "No, she has no passport," he said, "but I am sure the British Consul will be kind and help her home. I am sure of it. She too has absolute confidence in her country's Government, and would be utterly amazed to receive any unkindness from it."

With my own experience of passport difficulties in mind I marvelled at such faith. I have since learnt that it has been amazingly justified, and that the poor girl is safe at home. Her husband also learnt it before we left him. "But go back

to your story of Petrograd," I said, very interested.

" Well, we lived happily in our little house, selling first one thing and then another for food. One night, a gang of men forced their way in, showed Soviet passports, and took a great many of our valuable things. We were glad our lives were spared. Three times this thing happened, and we had very little left. One night, when my brother was with us, there came another intruder in the name of the Government. He tried to kill my brother. I shot him in the legs. He crawled to my feet and begged for his life. My brother and I left to hide. We were in hiding four months. The man I shot in the legs really was a Commissar. All the others were thieves with forged warrants. My wife was tormented every day to make her tell where I was. She did not know. She nearly died of suffering. And the little baby came." He looked dreamily away.

" If she had stayed in Petrograd for the coming winter she would have died. It was the only way."

" She shall come to me in England if she needs a home," I said. And with this promise, that any human being would have given, he was greatly comforted.

CHAPTER XII

The Dictatorship of the Communists

ONE baleful result of the late European war has been to weaken faith in political democracy amongst those people whom it most seriously concerns. And the most pitiful part of the tragedy is that the wounds of democracy have been delivered in the house of its friends. That is a big story which will one day be written in full. The important fact remains, that Parliamentary political machinery is in danger of being thrown upon the scrap-heap by those who see in it something antiquated and rusty and so incapable of serving their needs. With this in mind, we sought to discover if Russia had truly anything better to offer.

The vocational franchise upon which the Soviet is based has something to be said for it; but does the Soviet work? Is it what it is claimed to be, a more democratic form of government, and one more accurately reflecting the people's will? To this question it was difficult to get an answer. But whatever it might be capable of doing in a

highly educated, industrially efficient country like England or the United States, *it does not work in Russia*. There is not an ounce of democratic control in the politics of Russia. The theory is that everybody is entitled to vote. But the peasants have only one vote to the townspeople's five, or, to put it the other way, each townsman votes—if he works—but five peasants together cast one vote. All who do no work or who employ labour for profit, or who follow the priestly vocation are disfranchised. Women stand on the same footing as men in theory. But in the villages we explored we discovered a difference in eligibility to the Soviets. An illiterate man may be eligible, an illiterate woman is definitely not so.

The elections are not free. If free, in my judgment there would not be a majority for the Communists. Voting is by show of hands, so that those who vote against the candidates chosen for them by the Executive of the Communist party or sent down from the People's Commissars become marked men and women. In spite of this, the Mensheviki have secured majorities in certain districts where their candidates were well-known and needed no electioneering to carry them in; for, had they needed that their case would have been hopeless. As all the halls belong to the Government it is the simplest device in the world to engage them for the sole use of Com-

munist or approved candidates during an election. And as all the printing-presses likewise are the property and under the control of the Government, its opponents find it well-nigh impossible to have their case presented to the electors.

The Mensheviki have secured a little more than a quarter of the seats on the Moscow Soviet, in spite of all difficulties, which fact speaks volumes for their probable real strength. One story was told us of a factory which voted for an opposition candidate to Lenin by a proportional vote of something like seventy to eight, and when ordered to conduct a new election for the purpose of reversing the decision had the courage to stick to their guns and record seventy and eight the second time ; but such instances are not numerous, for the fear of authority is very great.

Theoretically " All Power to the Soviet," a favourite piece of rhetoric, is a true saying, or was so. For I discover in reading carefully the Thesis of the Executive Committee of the Communist International recently published to the world, that a new line is being taken. The pretence of democracy is vanishing. Every species of tyranny by the Communist party over the rest of the proletariat and people is justified, as it always has been in the writings of the principal men of the Communist Movement, until Communism becomes the accepted creed of mankind

and the Communist system is firmly established all over the earth.

The Soviet elects an Executive Committee. In Moscow this numbers forty persons. This Committee elects a Presidium. In Moscow this numbers nine. The power which may still linger in the Soviet to a small degree resides in this Presidium. But on this body and over the election of both the Presidium and the Executive Committee, the Government exercises great pressure, and naturally the Government nominees, who are all Communists, are elected to the Presidium, which sits daily.

Great play is made in defending this undemocratic arrangement and these terrific powers, of the " recall," which they allege, operates frequently and is a check on conduct. If recalls are as frequent as is claimed, the efficiency of business must be seriously jeopardised. But the recall is frequently exercised because some elected persons are obliged to go to the front and it is thought wise to put others in their places. Drinking, which is another reason for recall, should not be possible in a prohibition country. Personal spite and jealousy frequently come into the business. And an eloquent speaker, working upon an ignorant and changeable mass can so change their political point of view as to bring their representative easily within the criticism of his con-

stituents unless he changes with them. I have frequently observed in Russia the same person applauding the exactly opposite sentiments, a characteristic by no means confined to Russian men and women !

Seldom does the All-Russian Soviet meet, and then only to do formal business, such as recording the decrees issued by the People's Commissars or to ratify the decisions of the Communist party. The People's Commissars, of whom there are seventeen, have the power to issue decrees without consulting the Soviets at all. More than that, each Commissar can issue decrees relative to the work of his own department ; or two Commissars can do this in their joint names on a matter jointly affecting their two departments. These decrees have all the force of law, and must be obeyed under heavy penalties.

To the slaves of theory, the abstractionists and dogmatists, the decrees which consent to the modifications in committee management of industry must be considered wholly bad. But when I record the fact that the power of workmen to interfere through those committees in highly important productive and reconstructive work, either through delays, or ignorance, or in the name of a democratic principle run to seed, has given place all over Russia to control by experts, and management on lines of personal responsi-

bility, I am placing on record what I consider to be a good and wise thing.

In Russia Trade Unionism is of very recent birth. In February, 1917, there were three Trade Unions in Russia with a membership of less than one thousand five hundred persons. When the revolution broke out, some of the workmen thought it part of the plan to smash the machinery in the workshops, so ignorant were they of the source of their woes and of the remedy for these. The want of Trade Union training, the lack of discipline, the absence of co-ordination, both in industry and in their organisations, helped still further to increase the sufferings of the people, by delaying the work of rebuilding. The fear of bourgeois technical and scientific experts, who were accused freely of sabotage, caused their necessary skill and labour for a long period to be refused ; this still further aggravated the situation. And it appears to be entirely creditable that, in those matters where the special training and specialised mind are essential, the Communist rulers have seen proper to change their method.

But it is too dangerous a step on the road to complete centralisation of power to have made of the Trade Unions, as is practically the case, a Government department working under the control of the Supreme Economic Council.

The Supreme Economic Council, when its structure is complete, will have fifty productive departments under its control, a department of finance and a department for the co-ordination and supervision of the local Economic Councils which are spread all over the country. A Collegium of three or five members is in charge of each department, whilst the greater body, the Supreme Economic Council itself is controlled by a Presidium of eleven members, nominated by the Executive Committee of the Trade Unions and confirmed by the Council of People's Commissars.

We had speech with Miluitin, assistant to Rekoff, the People's Commissar for this department, who told us that, of the five thousand nationalised enterprises, seventy per cent were working more or less satisfactorily; but that whilst war and the blockade continued they could not hope to do more than maintain their industries in the condition of their comparative efficiency. They hoped, however, to develop and extend later on. All large industries such as coal, gold, iron, platinum, petroleum and their products, machinery, railway engines, etc., are nationalised; textiles, railways and large shipping; retail shops and banking. Banking has become the book-keeping department of the State. Money is still in use, but it is hoped to establish a system

of exchange which will remove the necessity of money altogether.

Russia has complete conscription of labour. All men and women of from eighteen years to fifty are obliged to work. The forms of Labour organisation are being militarised. A worker must go where he is sent and do what he is told under very heavy penalties. Late-coming and dilatory behaviour are punished heavily. Nobody is allowed to be idle, except, of course, the very old and the infirm.

This cannot be wholly condemned in Russia's present terrible condition. Those who would wish to stand idle in such circumstances ought to be constrained by hunger if public opinion is not sufficient, and if the discipline is at times over-severe, the breakdown of Russia's economic life is a very substantial excuse, if not a complete justification.

Those soldiers of the Red Army drafted into the Labour Army and the many civilian corps added to their numbers are doing good work in reconstruction in the mines, on the railways, at the oilfields and in the workshops. They are a mobile force, and are drafted in tens of thousands from one place to another as the need requires.

I was told that every effort was made not to disturb industries that are running satisfactorily by taking their workpeople for the Labour Army.

As far as possible the least usefully employed are diverted to the Labour Army. There have been administrative difficulties of a minor sort, and occasional revolts against the conscription of their labour by men who objected to leaving their homes and families, but on the whole the plan has worked well and has been of great benefit in the restoration of the railways and the oil supplies. It is not proposed to demobilise the Labour Army until the economic life of the country is re-established.

The Co-operative Societies have also become a great Government department, and it is hoped to hand over to them completely the work of the Food Commissariat. When their new organisation on these lines is completed the Co-operative Society, or " Centrosoyu " as it is called, will work under the authority of the Supreme Economic Council for the distribution of all articles of monopoly, such things as wheat, bread, coal, sugar, fur, textiles, clothing and timber. In distributing goods which are not monopolised by the Government at present the *Centrosoyu* will be guided by its method in respect of the other things. The Co-operative Societies are represented on the Supreme Economic Council, and the chairman has the right to attend the meetings of the People's Commissars, but he may not vote. Citizens are informed that there is no

compulsion on them to join the Co-operative Society, and there is no longer the attraction of the dividend ; but as theirs is the monopoly of bread, and the only other source of supply is the outlawed " speculator," whose charges are prohibitive—four hundred roubles for a pound of black bread—it is obvious that the freedom is illusory.

Similarly with the Trade Unions. Technically, I suppose, there is no compulsion to join a Trade Union ; but as it is impossible to live unless one does, since the more important part of the pay is in the food given to a worker and his family, and since such privileges as tickets for supplies of boots and clothing and other necessaries and free passes for the theatres and the concert-halls are supplied through the Trade Unions, or the Soviets, which are largely Trade Union in character, the wise man does not care to remain outside. These facts may account for the phenomenal increase in Trade Union membership, which is said to have leapt to nearly five million during the last three years. Five millions out of a population made up of eighty-five per cent peasants is a very considerable proportion of the industrial population, and constitutes a miraculous conversion of the multitude on any other supposition than the one I suggest.

And by all these signs we learn what the

" dictatorship of the proletariat " really means. Let there be no mistake whatever about this. I am wholly hostile to the artificial dictatorship of any class in those matters which are the serious concern of all. I believe in the dictatorship of the idea, that is in the power of the idea to conquer without force, and the right of the majority to decide all those matters of high policy which cannot be settled amicably without a vote ; but I consider that the sources of information should be available for all, the right of propaganda be universal and unrestricted, and the liberties and rights of the minorities safeguarded in all those things where the well-being of the community is not manifestly to all threatened by too great concessions. I believe that the Parliamentary machine needs very considerable overhauling ; that something of the nature of proportional representation should be devised ; that a chamber elected upon a vocational basis might very usefully replace the hereditary House of Lords. I believe in the devolution of power in national and local affairs, and would give not only to Ireland, but to Scotland and Wales and England their separate national one-chamber Parliaments. I would extend the vote to all adult women, as in Russia, and encourage the work of committees ; all this to better secure the expression in politics of the real will of the people.

But the Russian dictatorship does not do this.

It is, at the best, an attempt by a few men to compel the people of Russia to have what in their opinion is good for them. It may very well be that what they seek to impose and the methods by which they seek to impose it will in some ways benefit a lethargic race, unused to the ways of freedom. I express no opinion on the point, beyond saying this: That the argument of unfitness to manage one's own affairs has a very familiar ring about it to women. It was the favourite argument against granting the vote to women of a certain class of English opponent. Our good was sought, not our freedom.

But though the freedom was denied for so long, the good lingered also; and the Russian people might reasonably protest, and in many cases do protest, that there the good is lingering also. The great and fundamental question for all who are thinking seriously about these things is this: Has a handful of brilliant and thoughtful men, however good and sincere they may be, the moral right to enforce upon a whole community the system they believe in but the community as a whole rejects, with all the tyranny and cruelty such dictatorship must inevitably mean? Had the men of Russia the moral right to break up their own National Assembly, however inadequate and faulty, thereby bringing upon their country civil war and alien aggression, for the sake of a theory however magnificent?

It might be suggested that the majority in Russia does not reject the idea of Communism, because the whole population is behind the Government; which is perfectly true. But the population is behind the Government because it is a patriotic population, and it is threatened once more by the horror of foreign invasion. This is why the experiment in Russia has been spoiled. The really big things which are being attempted cannot be judged on their merits. Their success or their failure are inextricably mixed up with the various wars which Russia has suffered since the Revolution and with the blockade so cruelly drawn around her. When the history of these times comes to be faithfully written, it will not be the Russian Communists whose records will blacken the pages of history most. It will be the records of certain Allied statesmen, hitherto believed to be gentlemen and Christians, which will throw into bright relief the courage and resourcefulness of the present rulers of Russia.

No words can be too strong with which to condemn the action of those who first intervened to destroy Revolutionary Russia; and no loss to the world is more to be regretted than that loss of a valuable social experiment which would have shown the rest of the world what to imitate and what to avoid in its march towards a happier lot for all mankind.

It is the old, old story of force breeding force, and evil producing evil. The inhabitants of Russia lived so long with the evil system of the Czar's bureaucracy, with its Cossacks, and knouts, its prisons and scaffolds, that the thing has entered into their very blood, and under the necessity of maintaining their power, the Communist rulers slip easily and naturally into the same institutions and methods, adopting even the old machinery and the ancient servitors. But the cruelties and suppressions, said by them and their supporters to be necessary and inevitable in all the circumstances, will breed a resistance amongst themselves which will bring the structure tottering to the ground, unless the madness of their foes continues until the grip upon the people becomes too strong. Even so, such a thing will come to an end in time.

In the interests of Russia herself it is for those who care, to stop all alien wars against her, and so give her people a chance of shaking themselves free of tyranny, both within and without.

And for ourselves, we shall be wise to move as quickly as may be along the sure and peaceful paths of political and industrial democracy, seeking by education and by constant endeavour and sacrifice to convince the minds of men and women that the world has something better to give them of culture as well as comfort than the best of them have ever dreamed.

CHAPTER XIII

The Suppression of Liberty

IN December of 1917 there was established in Russia for the protection of the Revolution and " to carry on the merciless struggle against those trying to overthrow the Soviet system ; against sabotage, banditage and espionage and speculation " an organisation known as the Extraordinary Commission. It has an Advisory Board of fifteen persons, all members of the Communist party. Its head and chief is a man named Dserzhinsky, a fanatical Communist whose adoration of Lenin is notorious. He is assisted in his work, according to the Vice-President, with whom we had an interview, by a definite staff of four thousand five hundred persons, estimated by others who were present on this occasion at a number enormously greater than that. These assistants consider it their duty to arrest all whose actions appear to them to be inimical to the welfare of the Communist State.

This great army of spies and police agents, largely the same men as served the Czar's régime,

arrest for the most trivial offences and on the slightest suspicion. A young man who has saved his money and is buying his sweetheart a few expensive blossoms on her birthday is arrested by the person standing next him in the shop on suspicion of having received the money from some counter-revolutionary organisation. He is kept in prison for several months. A delicate woman is kept three days in prison for having too large a supply of white flour in her house. She got it for a dying father and a sick sister by selling valuable household goods. She was " denounced " by a former servant who occupies a room in the same house though he is not now in their service.

This Extraordinary Commission has its agents everywhere, in every organisation and at every public gathering ; and nobody can be sure of his neighbour or even of his friend. It has its own soldiers, who enjoy better rations than the men at the front, its own prisons and its " secret police." It formerly had the power of life and death, and has executed thousands of persons without trial. Though nominally that power has been taken from it and handed over to the Revolutionary Tribunals, it is by no means clear that the power does not actually remain. In any case, the Revolutionary Tribunals work in complete sympathy with the Commission, so there is no real change.

The Extraordinary Commission works independently of the Government and is so strong, thanks to the fear created by the war, that it is regarded as the Government in everything that matters. It was said that there is nobody in Russia who does not go in fear of it except Lenin. I have no means of testing this, of course ; but I know that everybody I met in Russia outside the Communist party goes in terror of his liberty or his life. The pervading fear worked terribly on the subconscious selves of some of us, and we lived hourly in a spirit of hot hate of the cruelties and tyrannies which met us at every turn.

The fair young English girl who came to beg us to help her and her baby to her friends in England, told us calmly but pathetically that her husband had been shot in prison.

" I do not know why," she said. " He was ot political. He never talked politics to me. He translated for the Russians in the army of Judenitch. But he was sent there by the Government."

Poor thing. Her husband was possibly guilty. But he had had no trial. She had lost him by violence. And she herself was threatened with starvation and was refused permission to leave the country.

Two hundred and forty-one anarchists we heard were shot out of hand in Petrograd, the new order against capital punishment being kept back until this had been done.

We were very glad of an opportunity of meeting those who claimed to speak authoritatively for the Commission, for the confession of shooting without trial ten thousand persons admitted in the Government's organ, *Isvestia*, had been deeply distressing to us.

" Is it true," the chairman was asked, " that the Extraordinary Commission has shot ten thousand people without trial ? "

" No, it is not true. The number is exaggerated. Only eight thousand five hundred were shot, and not without trial. They were brought before the Revolutionary Tribunals and examined." This answer was said to be quite untrue by credible persons to whom it was reported. Not only was a much greater number than ten thousand put to death without trial, but many were shot in their cells in circumstances of cruelty, and their relatives were refused information about them. I met one woman whose husband had disappeared from prison in suspicious circumstances and who was afterwards discovered to have been shot for selling something at a profit of a few shillings in English money. This private trading is what is meant by " speculating."

The chairman of the Commission had said in his opening address that there was perfect liberty of speech and action in the country. As I knew that a real terror existed I suggested to him that,

in all probability, the arrest of certain persons for imagined or trivial offences was due to the exaggerated zeal of ignorant minor officials working under the Commission. The reply was that this could not be so, since the agents who behaved like this would be punished very severely. I did not consider the answer conclusive, nor an explanation of the terror.

" Why," I asked, " have many people expressed a fear of coming to see us? And when they come, why are they afraid to speak with perfect confidence? "

" Because," said this clever person, sarcastic and evasive, " English people have been here before and have tempted our people into counter-revolutionary activities which have got them into very serious difficulties. They do not want to be caught again."

I ventured to ask one more question. " Does the Extraordinary Commission maintain spies and *agents-provacateurs* for its work? "

To this an absolute denial was given. " But," he continued, " every good citizen considers himself under an obligation to report to the Commission everything he sees which he considers to be of a counter-revolutionary nature."

It was denied that any conscientious objector had been shot. It was denied that anybody had been shot without trial. It was denied that any

great tyranny was exercised. It was declared that the object of the Extraordinary Commission was to protect perfect liberty of speech outside of those who were fomenting armed opposition to the Republic.

The independent translator who was with us on this occasion said before leaving the room, her eyes swimming with tears : " It is hard for me to hear these replies and be able to say nothing."

I left the room cold with horror and dislike, for I knew without the implication of the interpreter's words that much of what had been said to us was absolutely untrue.

There had been held a few days before this a meeting of Mensheviki, or moderate Socialists, the members of the old Social Democratic party. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Printers' Union, a body numbering seventy thousand members in Russia. This meeting was attended by some thousands of persons, including (as I was informed) about three hundred Communists, a noisy little group in the heart of the gathering.

I was not myself present, but I give the story as I had it from one of the members of the British Delegation, not himself in sympathy with the Mensheviki.

The Communists had telegraphed to England that the British Delegates had attended a public meeting at which they heard in perfect freedom

the great Menshevik, Tchernoff, make a speech. The facts of the case are these.

An unknown man made a passionately eloquent speech which was greatly applauded by the vast body of the meeting and frequently interrupted by the Communists present. At the end of his speech the audience loudly demanded his name. He hesitated. He was strongly pressed not to give it. He then stepped forward, and in ringing tones announced : " My name is Tchernoff." Instantaneously the vast audience broke into tumultuous applause, during which Tchernoff made his escape. The leading Communist present fumed, and declared loudly he would have Tchernoff arrested. He had come to the meeting with his pocket full of warrants !

But Tchernoff had gone. And the circumstances of his coming and going were interesting in view of the claim of free speech. For fifteen minutes before his speech nobody was allowed to enter the hall. For fifteen minutes after he got away, nobody was allowed to go out. The telephone wires had been disconnected so that no communication with the police could be made.

Tchernoff's wife and children were arrested as hostages, but afterwards released. He himself lives in a garret in Moscow, and was seen by one of the Delegates in a condition of starvation.

After the British Delegates left Russia several

of those who organised and addressed these meetings were arrested. And so it is everywhere and all the time. The people are afraid of the police and spies, the spies are afraid of one another. All dwell in an atmosphere of suspicion, and the Red Terror is a terrible reality. And it is no consolation to me to learn, as I did, that the White Terror was even worse. I am absolutely satisfied on the evidence I have seen, that where the Red Terror has slain its thousands the White Terror has destroyed its tens of thousands.

Evidence which will shortly be published in great detail will establish beyond doubt the enormous atrocities committed by Koltchak and Denikin in their cruel marches across the country, especially against the Jews. Men, women and children in hundreds in every district in their respective areas were hanged, shot or tortured on the mere suspicion of belonging to or aiding with food and clothing a member of the Red Army or the Communist party. Innocent persons whose beliefs and activities were never even enquired into were murdered to discourage the population. The peasants were everywhere robbed with violence. The neglected troops of Koltchak, themselves decimated by disease and filth, spread typhus and small-pox amongst the unhappy people. Instead of burning or burying the corpses, the bodies were packed into warehouses, or left

lying about; and in one district, in less than a dozen versts, ten thousand corpses were picked up by the Red Army when it drove back the rebels.

One more story only let me tell. It concerns the sister of one of the People's Commissars and that sister's husband. She lived in a little town in the Volga basin. During the march of Koltchak her home was invaded, and she and her husband, with twenty others, were thrown into prison. After a while, they were taken out into the bitterly cold night and, without trial, shot. The White soldiers bayoneted them to be sure the work was done, and retired.

By the most marvellous accident, the husband was not killed. His hand had been shot away, and the bayonet had entered his side, but he was living. He waited till all was dark and quiet. He bent over his wife, but she was quite dead. Then he crawled softly away, and very weak, reached his home. He found his little daughter of five sleeping, but safe. He dared not stay longer than to have his bleeding hand bound, for they would come at dawn and count the bodies, and his would be missing. So he went to the mayor, and the mayor contrived his escape. And the man is now in Moscow, as one may well imagine, a stern supporter of the Government, and not unready for reprisals.

I am inclined to believe that much of the support of the Bolsheviki is due to the fear that their overthrow would mean the coming of a great White Terror that would be infinitely worse than the thing they are enduring. The fiery threats of exiled Russians, the distressing activities in Russia of British agents, and, I am afraid, the wicked suggestions to certain European Governments, that a "Jewish pogrom in Russia would bring the Bolshevik Government to the ground," give some justification for the fear. Not till one side or the other declines to take revenge will the awful see-saw of horrors be discontinued, and a normal government by consent be substituted for the systems based on power and domination.

CHAPTER XIV

Down the Volga

IT was at the suggestion of one of the Delegates that the Bolsheviki kindly arranged a trip down the Volga, that great central waterway which flows for nearly two thousand miles to the Caspian Sea, and which is fifty miles broad where it empties itself into this great lake. We went in our special train, accompanied by interpreters, agents, secretaries and journalists, a party of thirty to forty people, all anticipating a good time, to the famous city of Nijni-Novgorod. The plan was to take the steamer there and go to Saratov, calling at towns and villages on the way, and returning by train to Moscow. It was estimated the trip would occupy six days.

There is no longer any great Fair at Nijni-Novgorod. Foreign trade has practically stopped, owing to the breakdown of communications. The booths are empty and closed. The streets in this part of the city are neglected and untidy. The coloured domes of the churches glitter and sparkle with the old, quaint loveliness, but the

city is the centre of what has been described as "a starving province," and is as sad as the rest of Russia.

The usual Trade Union deputations, with soldiers, banners, bands and speeches met us at the railway station. We were shown over the great Somova iron-works, and made speeches to the hungry-looking workpeople. We were informed that it is difficult to keep down the spirit of rebellion here; but this one would have expected of the population of Nijni-Novgorod, with its history of democratic struggles in the past. Unlike the men at the Putiloff Works, these men complain, not only of hunger, but of the incapable bureaucracy which is keeping back production.

We had a great public meeting in the theatre in the evening, following a dinner given us by the Soviet and Trade Unions, and, after the speeches, we formed into a procession, and followed by numbers of the townspeople as well as the audience, and accompanied by several regiments of soldiers, we marched down to the s.s. *Bielinsky* which was to take us on our voyage. The procession marched all round the higher part of the town that we might see the finest buildings and the splendid view from the heights above the river, singing revolutionary songs all the way.

The summer days are hot but the nights are bitterly cold on the Upper Volga. One of our number neglected himself, and contracted pleurisy and pneumonia within twenty-four hours of our setting sail, and his illness obliged some of us to go forward to Astrakhan and return the same way to Saratov. The organisation of the steamship, a magnificent vessel, was mystifying to us. First there was the recognised commander. Then there was Sverdloff, the Acting-Commissar for Ways and Communications, who appeared to be the highest authority ; then came the Trade Union Delegate who travels with the ship ; then the man in charge of our party, who seemed to be armed with authority over the crew as well. There were occasions when orders conflicted, and the result was very funny. After the great bulk of the people left at Saratov the ship's human machinery ran with greater smoothness.

A trip on the Volga was supposed to be one of the great experiences of the rich traveller before the war. It is an experience anyone may be very glad and proud to have had. More of the heart and soul of Russia lies on each bank of this mighty river than can be found in Russia's cosmopolitan cities. The country is low and fertile, except for the desert stretches of the lower reaches. The green of its grass is a bright emerald. Its roads and farm-buildings are a

consistent brown, like its sun-tanned, wind-bitten peasant people. Wild horses roam the steppes with the Cossacks and Tartar tribes, some of whom live close to the river, their brown, substantial houses seeming to rise straight out of the water in the estuary of the Volga. The enormous rafts which float slowly down the river, composed of the trunks of great trees bound together, are things of wonder. They are of enormous size. Whole families live on them, and huts have been erected on them for shelter. It takes weeks, even months for these rafts to creep down the river to the places for which they are bound. Often the rafts are built the shape of a boat and so sent floating to their destination.

The friendly people waved us their handkerchiefs as we passed. The passion for art of the Russian everywhere showed itself in the decoration with green branches of these rafts, of our own handsome steamer, and of the railway trains in which we travelled.

We called at many little villages or larger towns on the way down the river. The banks of the river and the plains beyond teem with people. It was no lonely prairie that we gazed upon as we floated idly. The millions of dead fish in the river were symbolic of the country's past state and present suffering, and of its fearful fate if left too long without substantial help. Nobody could

tell us authentically why those fish had died. Could the cholera germ have worked this miracle of death? Or was it Koltchak's poison gas? Their numbers made them remarkable.

Our talks with the peasant men and women revealed the fact that they were not Communists in the Marxian sense, scarcely Communist in any sense. They were content not to quarrel with the Government because it was so much better than the régime of Koltchak, whom they hated; and because of the war. They grumbled at the requisitions of food, and hated the soldiers sent to collect it. But they were amenable to persuasion. One friend of the peasants, a Communist, told me that he was sent by the Government to talk to the peasants, because he was so successful in persuading them to give up their spare produce. He was a man of quiet and gentle manner whom it would be difficult at all times to resist.

The peasants we saw were a big, blond, stalwart race, with any quantity of shaggy, curly hair and with matted beards. Their features were Slav. They had large mouths, thick lips and broad noses. They wore high boots, much the worse for wear, and smocks with broad belts. Their women were big for the most part, pleasant and round-faced, and their legs were bound in what looked like white canvas which gave them a

tubular appearance. They wore canvas or felt shoes, very inadequate for country roads. Their aprons and blouses were amazingly white in one village, which gave one the impression that there they probably made their own soap. The children were attractive replica of their parents. One small boy showed us proudly that he could write his own name in a good hand.

Whenever we left the ship, we did so between two lines of peasants with country produce for sale, eggs, milk and fruit ; so there was no lack of food on this river trip.

We talked to the peasants about the land. They were happier than before for they had now more land, and all had some. The big estates had been broken up and divided amongst them. Nominally it was the State's land, but it would have been counter-revolutionary propaganda to have said this aloud. Really there is a system of peasant proprietorship, with the substantial difference that the peasant may not part with his land for money. If he works it well, it remains undisturbed in his possession and usually it goes to the son after the father. The local Soviet settles land disputes, and we were the interested spectators in the adjudication of one quarrel.

One little house we entered was very clean and neat, but the rooms were too dark and too small, and too many people lived in the house. We were

told that this specimen was very much above the average. In every room was an ikon, and in every village a church, crowded with worshippers, filled with expensive things. Truly, the Commissars would be well advised to commandeer and not condemn the institution which has so great a grip on the lives and affections of the people.

I am reminded here of a curious and beautiful adventure of ours, a few versts on this side of Astrakhan. It was two in the morning, with a bright round moon in the sky, when the ship stopped and boats were lowered. A violin softly played, and the crooning of their Volga songs by the boatmen added charm to the scene. We took to the boat and landed on the right bank of the river. Millions of crickets chirped in the grass. In the distance a bullfrog croaked himself hoarse. Suddenly there came upon our view the outlines of an Eastern building. Its cupola shone in the moonlight. It was a Buddhist temple.

We marched up to the door and entered, much to the concern of the priest, who feared, doubtless, a revolutionary attack upon his person and the church. He was a quaint old man, round and stout, dressed in a bright red robe, his good-natured, Chinese-looking face adding to the novelty of the scene. He was a Kalmuk, and his

ministry extended over a population of ten thousand Kalmuks, living in the little town beyond It was an amazing thing to discover this little bit of Asia in Europe.

The Kalmuks are an attractive race in appearance, clean, strong and efficient-looking. The women have glossy black hair which they wear neatly in two braids. Their children are chubby and well fed, with slanting brown eyes and olive skins. We left this temple and its people possessed of several tiny brass gods and holy pictures with which the priest appeared not unwilling to part.

At Samara some of us went to inspect a children's colony outside the town. As usual, it was the expropriated dwelling of a former rich citizen. Indeed, several houses were devoted to this good purpose. The woman Communist who kindly conducted us had all the smiling good nature of her race. She was evidently devoted to the children, and proud of what had been accomplished. She was obviously in great need of new clothes. Her legs were bare. One poor sock was falling over her shoe top. The naked toes were peeping out of the other shoe. Her jacket was the last word in shabbiness. Yet she was bright and cheerful as a bird and infinitely pathetic as she asked me, with pride in her voice : " Have you anything like this (meaning the summer school) in England ? "

We drove back to the ship impressed with the pluck and cleverness of those heroic people making bricks without straw. A great wind-storm caught us. The dust whirled about our heads. The rain began to fall. I hid behind a bank of flowers, which had been given us, to avoid seeing the half-eaten corpse of a dead dromedary as well as to shelter from the rain. We reached the steamship. The whistle hooted, and off we went to the next scene.

Saratov is the finest city we saw on the Volga. It is a great deal cleaner than most, and compares in this very favourably with Tsaritzin. But Tzaritzin has experienced more of the depredations and disorders of the Koltchak bands, so must be excused.

It was at Saratov we discovered the origin of that silly story of the nationalisation of women. Whoever knows the Russian woman would wonder if she had changed to allow herself to be nationalised. I could not imagine those huge women fish-curers and net-makers at Astrakhan tolerating for one second of time any such gross interference with their personal liberty ; nor the gentle Kalmuk women, nor the self-respecting peasant wives. There is not one atom of truth in the story, and those who repeat it cover themselves with discredit. The story had its origin in Saratov, where a tiny anarchist sect had for one of

their remote objects a state of society in which men and women would dispense with marriage in their relationships with one another. It was unscrupulous propaganda to place this upon the Bolshevik Government.

It is true that marriage laws have been altered. Marriage is very cheap now, since only a State ceremony is needed. Divorce is very easy, but equal for all classes and both sexes. The children are the first concern of the State, and illegitimate children are not penalised. But there is nothing relative to marriage in Russia which is not true of some Western state ; and it is believed that with the reorganisation of life on a sound economic basis, prostitution will entirely disappear, as it has certainly been considerably reduced. The women of Russia are not very happy, but their misery is not due to any sex-tyranny or Government brutality. It is due to the lack of food and clothing for themselves and their families, and to the bitter cold which makes their work in the home so hard.

For during last winter almost everybody lived in his house in a temperature of five degrees of frost. Tender children and old people died like flies, of simple cold. Frost-bitten hands and feet and the consequent loss of fingers and toes was a common occurrence. Pipes were frozen, and when the thaw came, broke, everything in the house

being destroyed. There were no materials for repairs. Waiting in the long queues their turn at the baker's shop, trying to keep children and home clean without soap, having to go long distances for water, without coal and wood to cook and clean, with children crying for milk or food, little bodies frozen for lack of blankets—these are the real griefs of women in Russia, and not the ludicrous stories of imaginary wrongs.

We called at Kazan on our way down the river, and here we had a curiously funny experience. At Kazan, and increasingly as we descended the river, we were plagued with flies. They were so numerous, these tiny little beasts, that they made a misty curtain round us, and filled eyes and mouths and ears in a most irritating fashion.

We walked from the boat for about a quarter of a mile, ploughing our way through deep sand, to the place which had been appointed for our reception. We walked between lines of soldiers and sailors standing strictly to attention. The local Commissars were late, so the lesser officials thought it wise to begin, as the flies were troublesome and the English guests were not used to them.

A ramshackle droshky, with an old Chinese driver, was commandeered for a platform. One of our speakers mounted, and, standing on the seat, commenced his oration. The horse showed

a tendency to bolt at every sentence, whether because of the flies or the unknown language it is not quite certain. The sentences came explosively, as every movement of the animal jerked the orator off his balance. The old Chinaman seized a large twig branch from a man who was fanning himself and tried to keep the horse quiet by driving away the flies. Round about our heads surged and hummed masses of flies. We shook ourselves, we smoked, we did a great many things besides; but the flies remained, and the speeches, one after another, went on with interminable eloquence. For a solid two hours we stood there suffering and grinning at the Chinaman, the flies, the absurd seriousness of everybody, the familiar phrases: "Long live the Proletarian Revolution." "Long live the Soviet Republic." "Long live Lenin and Trotsky."

At last we were released, to learn that a great demonstration of eighty thousand troops had been arranged for the following day. We could not stay, however, and bade our friends a warm good-bye; the flies also, but for a different reason.

Seriously, though, the insect life of that part of Russia is incredible. It is no exaggeration to say that at Astrakhan, when the meal was finished, the big black flies on the table were so many that it looked as though we had dined off a black in-

stead of a white tablecloth. The mosquitoes are so vicious and poisonous that they often give one malaria, and the lice are inveterate conveyers of typhus.

Astrakhan is the dirtiest city it has been my lot to visit. Cesspools and stagnant water pollute the streets. Piles of human excrement lie about everywhere. The water-supply is thoroughly poisoned. The market-places are abodes of filth. And it appears to be nobody's business to alter this state of affairs. Astrakhan and cities like it should come under the supervision of an international Board of Health if their governments are powerless to alter things, for they are a menace to the well-being of the whole world. Cholera coming up the river from Astrakhan could poison all Europe in time, and may yet do so unless something drastic be done.

But Astrakhan is becoming busy again. Its shipping is very active. We saw the loading of rice and fish, the curing of herrings, the preparation of caviare, the making of nets, the ferry-boats loaded with passengers, a general air of liveliness which contrasted so favourably with the deadness of Petrograd. Persian carpets are to be bought for a mere song in Astrakhan, and antique treasures of all kinds for the equivalent in English of a few shillings or pounds.

The temperature at Astrakhan was 122 degrees

in the shade when we were there, and we simply wilted under the blazing sun. We talked of Siberian snows and American ice cream to try to make ourselves feel cool, when to our pleased surprise, the magician, Sverdloff, contrived to conjure ice cream out of the kitchen and so saved our lives for another day's work.

Those last days on the Volga were very happy, in spite of heat and flies and the anxiety we felt for our sick friend. The tumultuous crowd had left us at Saratov; the atmosphere of politics disappeared; our talk was of more interesting things; we sang our folk-songs and read our books. In the hot evenings on the way back, we sat at the front of the ship facing the glorious red sunset, and thought of home and of dear old England, and of the kindly spirit which rules where peace and plenty abound.

CHAPTER XV

The Future of Russia

THE Delegation having been divided through the unfortunate sickness of one of their number, we left the country and returned to England in several groups and by different routes. The group of which I was a member took train at Saratov, and was enabled to go all the way through to Reval without a change. The country looked pleasant and peaceful. Large herds of cows were a frequent feature of a prosperous-looking landscape—for it cannot be too often impressed that the country is not lacking in food so much as clothing and other goods, and that if the means of transportation were better the peasants could supply much more to the towns. The green of the fields looked inviting after the brown of the river. The cool winds of the plains blew in on us through the carriage windows and were a grateful relief after the shimmering heat of Astrakhan and the lower reaches of the Volga.

Having little to do but prepare our meals after Moscow was left behind, we discussed with one another our impressions. We speculated upon the possible change of view which might have been effected in some of us by our experiences. What should we say to the people who had sent us out? And what ought we to say to the great working-class public at home anxious to have our report? One thing we were unanimous in hoping: That nothing might be said or done that would make it more difficult for peace with Russia to be concluded speedily. Never for a second was there a shade of difference amongst the Delegates that the war was a crime in its inception and a blunder in its continuance. But on other matters we differed. Some came out of Russia filled with uncritical enthusiasm for the Bolsheviki; others were bitterly disappointed in their expectations; others again were confirmed in former opinions.

As we approached the frontier once more, I put my head out of the window to take a last look at the Red Flag. There it was gaily waving in the wind. A colleague started to whistle a familiar air.

"What is that you are whistling?" I asked, "a last verse of 'The Internationalé'?"

"No," he replied with a wry smile, "a new verse of the Red Flag."

We were curious and he obliged us with the words :

> "The people's flag is palest pink,
> It's not so red as you might think ;
> We've been to see, and now we know
> They've been and changed its colour so."

" So, my irreverent friend, that is how you feel, is it ? " I asked, feeling that I understood.

" It is," he replied. " I went out without the slightest bias in the world against what I regarded as a very big thing, the establishment of a great Socialist Republic, and I have come out with a deep feeling of disappointment. There is practically no Socialism in Russia worthy of the name. And the people are utterly wretched."

I could see that his flippant mood covered a very real disappointment, and was silent for a while ; then I reminded him that perhaps we had expected too much, and he seemed to agree.

There are many ways of regarding the problem of Russia, each one leading to a different conclusion and generally a faulty one. There is the man who considers it solely from the point of view of present achievement without regard to the special difficulties which have had to be overcome. Such a critic is not reasonable and is bound to be contemptuous, for judging the thing just as it stands, and chiefly by the condition of the people who live under it, Bolshevism is a failure. It was bound to be a failure. No living human being

faced by so many and such frightful difficulties could have made it a success. Alien invasion, internal disorder, counter-revolutionary activities, scarcities of necessaries of all sorts, the blockade of Russia—all these things made it quite impossible for the Russian Revolutionary Government with the best brains and the finest intentions in the world to carry out more than a fraction of its programme in a very imperfect manner. The wonder is not that they have failed to establish Socialism, but that they have successfully accomplished so much that is good.

But the person who maintains that so much has been done and done admirably that the other nations should immediately copy is making just as big a mistake in the other direction. Much might advantageously be imitated by countries where the war has created similar problems. Russia has communised her housing accommodation, so that now everybody has shelter and nobody need be overcrowded. This is all to the good. From such things the overcrowded towns and cities of Europe might take a lesson from Moscow; but unless and until the new institutions of Russia, political, industrial, and social, prove themselves to be of more social value than the similar institutions of other lands, the men are doing a disservice to their country who advocate the slavish copying of Russia.

One of the most admirable features of the Russian Administration so far has been its elasticity. In spite of the extremists and because of the pressure of circumstances, the Russian Administration has shown a disposition to scrap its failures and to turn from one experiment to another in a way which well might serve as an example to the hide-bound politicians of other lands.

To some people method does not matter; the end is all in all. Such people do not feel the tyranny which is exercised over the people to be offensive, nor do the cruelties excite their wrath. They regard these things as temporary, and to them the end always justifies the means. To them, no doubt, it appears that the end will be achieved by such means. Nor are they possessed by any fear that what is meant to be temporary will harden into a system and become permanent. With eyes on some splendid future they would tolerate the worst crimes committed under the régime of the Czar if done in the name and for the sake of Communism. It was with this class of supporter of Bolshevism with whom I was in hourly conflict.

For I believe very sincerely that in such a matter as this the good end cannot be achieved by vile means, and that the extremists who use methods of force and violence are preparing the

ground for a reaction so complete that it would not be surprising if it ended with a new king on every one of the vacant thrones of Europe.

But the biggest blunder of all is made by those people who start with the assumption that Russia is like the rest of Europe, and that her people are the same as ours. It is the most fatal blunder.

Russia is, in size, not a country, but a continent. It contains one hundred and twenty-five millions of people who speak fifty different languages. The neighbouring federated states take their orders from Moscow in everything except local affairs, and the so-called independent border states will one day discover their economic relationship to Russia and will federate. Such a population, with such resources as Russia possesses, will become a blessing or a menace to the rest of the world.

The Russian people are the most illiterate in Europe. Their civilisation is generations behind Western civilisation and is of a different sort. They have a tradition of tyranny that sets them in a different category from the people of Anglo-Saxondom. They are a silent, passive people for the most part, sentimental and idealistic. They are composed, in the main, of peasants whose chief absorbing interest is the land which they love with intense passion.

Such a people are in huge contrast to the

teeming industrial populations of Great Britain and America. In these countries the workers have long enjoyed a measure of political and social freedom unknown to the people of Russia. They have organised themselves politically and industrially on a big scale, and the standard of comfort they have been able to exact for themselves and their families from the employing classes and from Parliament is very considerably higher in average than the best the Russian workman has known.

Most of the organised workers of Great Britain (and probably of America also) possess a little property, if it is only the dividend they draw from the Co-operative Stores. The illiterate man or woman is practically unknown amongst them. Their children enjoy free education. Their cities are organised and comparatively healthy. With the power of the franchise and the industrial power of their trade organisation they can achieve any reform they may desire. They possess a tradition of freedom of conscience, of speech, of Press, of general living which no tyrant in office would dare long and without good cause to defy.

They are moving slowly but surely towards the achievement of that economic freedom without which they cannot hope to make secure the rest. And this they are doing without the bloodshed and suffering to themselves and innocent people that violent change would inevitably produce. Why,

then, should they copy Russia, whose condition is so different and to whom it might have appeared there was no other way out? I feel myself so strongly the value of liberty that I would not jeopardise it, even for a hypothetical Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

I do not think the British workman is in danger of committing this folly. He sees much too far for that. By temperament he is slow but sure. He is not easy to move along unaccustomed paths, but he jogs steadily along the old high road. He is often charged with loving comfort and his glass of beer too fondly; but the ruling passion as I have seen it in him is his love of home and wife and children. He will not readily risk their happiness in pursuit of a chimerical Garden of Eden which might rob him of his present content. He knows there are even greater things in the world than bread and meat, important though these things be. If the alternative were placed before him of security without freedom, or the liberty to live his own life in his own way with as much risk of losing his livelihood as he suffers under the present system, he would choose liberty.

And he would do this because instinctively he would feel that tyranny was an evil, and that kindliness and toleration are worth more than the most perfect system in the world without these things. And he would be right.

The choice is not an inevitable one. The tyranny in Russia is due to the domination of a minority, to the seizing of power by violence, and the necessity of holding it by force. It is not inherent in the Socialist system if that be achieved gradually and in harmony with the people's desires and developing intelligence.

My great hope for the future of Russia lies in the possibilities of peace. If outside aggression really ceases Russia can begin at once to amend herself. If the blockade be really broken down, contact with the world will soften many of the acerbities of the Communist rulers and ameliorate the condition of the people ; but it must be a real breakdown. The people of England must see that they are not deceived by misleading replies to Parliamentary questions. There are more ways than one of blockading a country. Postal, telegraph and commercial relations should be at once established ; there should be no Customs rules and regulations to block the way to full free trade ; the people of the two countries should be given liberty freely to travel from one land to the other, and the Governments of Europe should recognise diplomatically the established Government of Russia, and treat it with all the courtesies usually accorded by one nation to another when there is peace between them.

When fear is removed from their hearts, the

fountains of internal criticism will once more begin to play upon the Russian Government. Its rough edges will be smoothed, its corners rubbed off. It will be obliged by facts and circumstances to move still further along the path of honourable compromise with the outside world. There will be much more personal freedom, less hunger, more happiness ; at least, so I hope and believe.

For the alternative is too terrible to contemplate. The alternative is either a renewal of civil strife on the part of those whom the continuation of an extreme policy would continue to deprive of their freedom ; or the development in the Communist party and the Russian people of a kind of Imperialist Communism, which would regard it as a duty to direct the country's organisation towards the establishment of world-Communism.

But even if this latter idea should ultimately dominate it will not be made manifest at once. Russia's material needs are too great. From the very beginning I have maintained that nothing would menace the worst features of Bolshevism so greatly as a return to the people of a measure of prosperity; for it is upon masses of hungry and unhappy people and not upon the prosperous and well-fed that the eloquent tyrant with land and plenty to offer them is able to work his malignant will.

Let us intervene, then, in Russian affairs with the only intervention that was ever justified—with food and clothing and medicines; with raw materials, agricultural machinery and sanitary supplies; with doctors and nurses and sanitary experts; with railway workers, plumbers and engineers. Let us do all in our power to help the Russians quickly to re-establish their economic life. Then, perhaps, the past may come to be forgotten and forgiven, and Russia become what she was destined from before the foundations of the world to become—a great leader in the humanitarian movements of the world.

For the Russians are amongst the world's most tender dreamers. Humanity sorely needs their vision in this hour. At a time when the fatal folly and weakness of a few has flung mankind into the pit of materialism, it would be of incalculable value to Europe and the world to restore to it the idealism of a hundred millions of dreamers.

The Mayflower Press, Plymouth, England. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.
F. 40. 8.20.

The Times
Book Club
380 Oxford Street
LONDON.